

LIFE IN INDIA.

VOL. III.

LIFE IN INDIA;

OR, THE

ENGLISH AT CALCUTTA.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1828.

I. B. NICHOLS AND SON, 25, PARLIAMENT STREET WESTMINSTER.

LIFE IN INDIA.

CHAPTER I.

My story like the tale of life, is party-coloured,
Now grave, and now gay.

STALE MORALITY.

As soon as the defeat of Lieutenant West's party, and the loss of the treasure were known at Benares, the commanding officer was directed to send out a strong party in pursuit of the offenders, and as there were few officers at the station, though it was a duty something below his rank, Major Melville was appointed to this disagreeable service, and obliged at an hour's warning, to proceed to scour the jungles in search of foes, who from the manner of their attack were supposed to be numerous; and from their lawless and plundering habits of life,

perfectly acquainted with the country. West's clashy * had given such a particular description of the person of the chief who had secured his master, that little doubt was entertained but the celebrated O Meer Sing must be the depredator. He was known to command a numerous and desperate banditti, who for years had been the terror of the country; but as they had never before ventured to despoil the Company, the search after them had not been carried on with such vigour as to prevent their escape. When a village had been plundered, and its inhabitants murdered, parties had been sent in pursuit; which the robbers commonly evaded, by dashing into the dominions of neutral princes, whose concurrence was at all times easily secured by participation in the plunder. Here the case was different; the Company were the sufferers, and to a large amount; and Government caused a statement of the offence, to be sent to all their Native Allies requiring their permission to let search, if necessary, be made in their territories, and

* Tent-pitcher.

assistance given to discover the robbers. Scouts were sent out in every direction, and the intelligence they received of O Meer Sing was, that he had effected his escape into Oude, and was in hiding amongst his Majesty's, the King of Oude's, refractory zeemindars.* There Melville followed him from one native stockade to another, and was sometimes obliged to level these fortifications with the ground, before he could dislodge him. He resolutely defended every place in which he took shelter, to the last moment, in order to wear out his pursuers, and when further defence was impossible, mounted his horse, which was always in waiting, and fled to the next strong-hold. These stockades are protections thrown up by the landholders, to defend themselves against the exactions of the tax-gatherers; and as the one party is just as unwilling to pay what is justly due, as the other is ready to practise most grievous extortion, the affair is seldom brought to an adjustment without blows given and blood shed. The taxes are

* Landed-proprietors.

sold by the king to the highest bidders, and the takeels who purchase them have authority to make the circuit of the provinces, when the crops are upon the ground, and settle their arbitrary assessments, at their own good pleasure. This is commonly to the very uttermost rupee that the state of the harvest will permit; leaving to the wretched cultivators a bare subsistence, and the satisfaction of knowing that, however luxuriant the harvest may be, the pleasure of labour is all the reward they must expect. Their honourable masters are permitted to come with a strong body of troops, and with fire and sword sweep the produce of the harvest into the royal treasury, taking care always to reserve an equal share for themselves in private, as a reward for their trouble and risk.

O Meer Sing had before assisted the zeemindars; now it was their turn to render him the same service. The pursuing party were by this means denied sleep or rest; even food could be taken but by snatches; and, worn out with fatigue, and hopeless of success, Melville resolved to present himself at the court of Lucknow and

demand the interference of the Company's resident. He was now out of the Company's provinces, and in a land where every man keeps his own by the strength of his arm, and ploughs his field with his target on his back, and his tulwar at his side, and is sometimes called upon to use both, in the defence of the bullocks in his plough.

It is a well-known fact that, under native governments, where thieves can commonly afford to buy protection at a higher rate than better men, the eyes of power wink at the dirty sources from which the bright gold flows; and that whole villages exist, whose inhabitants are of the caste of thieves, whose fathers and grandfathers were thieves before them, and whose children will be thieves after them; and, provided they do not practise their trade too near home, and never fail in their assessments, no notice is taken: so that in such circumstances Melville experienced more obstruction than assistance from the people he was amongst, who seemed to have a natural abhorrence of all power supported by legal authority, and a kind of fellow

feeling with one who had carried off a government treasure.

At the moment of Major Melville's arrival at Lucknow, he found that his Majesty, the King of Oude, his royal Court, and the British resident, had all gone forth to witness a sport, in which his Majesty took great delight—an elephant fight. Thither Melville followed, having first made his toilette, and put himself in condition to appear before royal eyes. When he arrived upon the ground a little before sunset, he found the sport upon the point of commencing, and knew that a moment of so much interest was not to be broken in upon by the claims of business; he therefore advanced as near as he conveniently could, the pedestrian natives, where it was possible, making way for his horse, and took his station where he could see the royal party seated, with all attention to Asiatic etiquette, under magnificent canopies, and protected from the thronging of the multitude, or any accident which might happen where so many animals were collected together. Many of the natives of rank rode elephants, numbers were on horseback,

and many in carriages of different descriptions. The plain without the lists seemed one dense mass of human creatures, all anxiously watching the movements of two huge male elephants, who drew near in opposite directions. It is impossible to look upon a multitude of human beings without feelings of deep interest, whatever the cause may be that has brought them together, or whether their object is one in which we can sympathize or not. Whether our feelings be anger and indignation, at the unnatural pleasure found in stirring up peaceable animals to destroy each other; or pity and disgust, as at the congregations of expiation and sacrifice in Bengal; or martial pride and prophetic sorrow, as on military reviews, still they are powerfully excited, and give us to know that there is a spirit within which associates us with our kind even against our will, and that there is a power in multitude which finds its respondent in every human bosom. Major Melville felt this as he looked upon the glitter and parade, the display of pomp and life, for such an unworthy purpose; but found that he also held his breath, when the formida-

ble combatants were led into the arena. In an instant the whole plain was in motion, as if the spectators by moving an inch could see better, and turbans undulated, and shawls streamed, while the rays of the sun flashed back from the gold and silver caparisons of elephants and horses, or glittered upon the jewels and sumptuous tulwars of their riders. The elephants were introduced at opposite sides of the enclosure, and the openings by which they entered securely closed after them. A clamour of exultation rose over the plain, intermixed with the shrill neighing of the horses. The combatants for a few minutes stood face to face, eyeing each other with every symptom of rising anger, which all their reputed wisdom was ineffectual to repress; then, rearing their trunks with a curve high over their heads, ran furiously at each other, uttering roars of rage, which caused all the horses in the field to rear and curvet to the imminent danger of their riders. The furious elephants came together full shock, with a noise which shook the ground like thunder, and renewed their hideous roaring; they

charged again and again ; their blows might be heard in alternate succession, like the strokes of a sledge hammer, until after what his Majesty pronounced to be a very good battle, the heaviest elephant seemed evidently giving way, exhausted by his own exertions ; his adversary saw his advantage, and struck him such a blow with his trunk that, mad with pain, he turned and fled.

Melville, though deeply interested in the fate of the noble animals before him, could not help being from time to time attracted by the manners and appearance of a native who stood by him, and who also seemed to survey him with more interest than the native apathy usually permits. His dress at once showed that he was a Hindoo of high caste. It was altogether white and of very fine materials. Melville remarked that notwithstanding the heat of the weather, his jacket was quilted ; a large cummerbund * bound his waist, set in fine and nicely arranged folds, and firmly drawn as if for walking or riding ; below it appeared a gold-

* Sash.

linked waistband, from which his tulwar hung suspended. His turban, white as the drifted snow, was also by its ample folds, beautifully crossed and re-crossed over each other, a good defence against the rays of the sun, or the blows of a sabre, as occasion might require. In his ears he wore gold ear-rings, and round his neck a massy broad gold collar, studded with large polished projecting knobs ; on his wrists he wore bangles of the same metal, and his fingers were covered with rings ; his shoes, with their long pointed curling toes, were plainer than be-seemed the rest of his dress, being merely yellow morocco with a little silver embroidery on the front of the foot, and indicated that he had not come on the ground in a palanquin. His chudder* was thrown over his left shoulder, much in the way of a Highland plaid, and contrary to common custom, light enough to leave both his arms at liberty. His age Major Melville thought might be about two or three and thirty ; and, accustomed as he was to see graceful

* A very large muslin shawl.

and dignified carriage amongst natives, he thought he had never remarked it in a greater degree than in this man. He stood with his arms folded over his bosom, and his head a little drawn back, looking intently upon the combat before him; his black eye from time to time flashed fire as he observed the successful blows, but no muscle of his finely formed countenance moved; and while it was evident that the spirit within felt strongly, the outward man remained as immovable as if he had been carved in marble. His features, high and regular, were well calculated to express all strong passions; his coal black hair, mustachios, and short beard, had a slight turn in the points, which might be natural or the effect of careful keeping, as there was not a single hair out of place in either, while the ruddy glow which mantled through his dark cheek, showed he was accustomed to air and exercise. When the defeated elephant turned, he cast a glance upon Melville, but without moving his head, and when he fled, his nostrils dilated with scorn. Flushed with conquest, the triumphant victor followed, and his

trunk repeated the blows until the vanquished, sorely pressed and perfectly furious, effected a breach in the barrier and rushed through the assembled multitude, crushing under foot and trampling to death every one in his way. Melville's horse became perfectly unmanageable, reared, and spinning round on his hind legs tried all in his power to dislodge his rider; but Melville kept his seat, and the native who had watched his movements, seized the bridle with a practised hand, and with a jerk brought the horse to the ground, advising Melville, in Hindostanee, to lose not a moment in effecting his escape from danger; an advice with which he was well disposed to comply, but his refractory animal, in his efforts to turn him, frantic with fear, bolted forward and fell, throwing his rider just in the path which the infuriated elephant was taking. The native who had before assisted him, made a spring in the same direction, and, drawing a pistol from his cummerbund, which had been concealed by his chudder, took a steady aim at the eye of the exasperated elephant, and lodged the contents in

his brain. He fell with a groan, and expired ; while his destroyer re-placed his pistol in his belt, and disappeared.

The crowd was so immense, and the elephant's bursting out so sudden, that though a simultaneous movement had been made to give him way, it was impossible to escape him. Smarting under the shame of his defeat and his wounds, he seemed resolved to inflict something of what he suffered on every creature which stood in his way, and ran in and trampled under foot wherever the crowd was thickest ; he had marked his path with destruction, until the moment his resolute adversary had brought him to the ground, and he had barely fallen when a hundred voices exclaimed together, "Seize the man who dared to kill the king's favourite elephant !" "What are the lives of low caste men, to the king's pleasure ?" "Slaves who would be much honoured by dying under the feet of an animal who had borne the ruler of the destinies of men !" Even those whom his presence of mind had rescued from instant death, with true native servility shouted, "Seize

him ! seize him ! cut off his ears and his nose ! off with his head for his presumption !” But this man who seemed as active as he was resolute, ran through the opening the elephant had caused in the crowd, and crossed the road which bounded the plain, where a black horse stood picketed under a tree. A native who watched the approach of his master, undid the heel ropes while he leaped into his saddle. His foremost pursuer just got up with him, as he mounted his well trained steed. “Seize O Meer Sing!” shouted the muscular chokeydar,* as he ran with his target on his left arm, and brandished his tulwar with the other. “Seize him whose name makes mens’ hearts to tremble, and get the price which is set upon his head, and a great name to fill the world !” But the redoubtable O’Meer Sing, for it was indeed he, lost no time in useless parley ; he turned round, raised himself in his stirrups, discharged his second pistol with as sure aim as he had done the first, and laid his adversary flat on the grass.

* Watchman.

The horse seemed to share the spirit and feeling of the rider ; he snorted at the well known sound of the pistol, and, skimming the earth like a swallow, was out of sight in an instant, even before his unmounted pursuers could make a second effort. Thus baulked of their prey, the agitated multitude heaved upon the plain like the sea after a gale, swelling in broken waves and confused murmurs.

As a mere robber, O Meer Sing, could have contrived to hide himself from justice in the very centre of the court of Lucknow, (according to the Hindostance proverb, which shrewdly observes, "It is dark under the lamp,")—under the wing of a powerful protection, whose interest he had the means to secure, he could with a little precaution have dwelt at ease. None would presume to recollect the features or the deeds of him who reposed in the shadow of a favourite's protection. But now the case was changed. A slave who had presumed to interfere with royal pleasures was unworthy to live ; and every loyal subject knew that the delinquent's head would be a foundation on

which to build his fortune. Then the number of men he had killed with his own hand, the houses he had burnt, and the villages he had sacked, were faithfully recorded against him.

Many of his own people had mixed with the crowd, and ran anxiously forward as if to assist in his capture, which in fact they obstructed by intercepting the pursuers and increasing the commotion. O Meer Sing took the way to the river, where a twelve-oared boat lay in readiness, her hands resting on their oars. His horse, as if perfectly acquainted with what was expected of him, leaped in, his rider still in his saddle; the boatmen pulled their oars, they flashed in the air, and notwithstanding the deep and rapid stream, the vessel under their skilful guidance, shot quickly to the opposite side; where two or three armed horsemen waited its approach; and it had no sooner gained the shore, than the horse with one bound as before, leaped on the bank, and continued his rapid route.

As soon as Melville had recovered from the stunning effect of his fall, he waited upon the resident, and laid a statement of his circum-

stances before him. To be obliged to proceed against the man who had just saved his life, was a hard requirement of duty, but as a soldier he felt himself obliged to continue the pursuit of him, whom as a man he was bound to save by every tie of gratitude. O Meer Sing doubtless by a thousand acts, by his whole life, deserved to die, but it was an exertion to save Melville which had brought him into his present condemnation ; and Melville in bitterness of spirit, almost wished that he had been permitted to take his chance with the enraged elephant, rather than compelled to hunt for the life of his preserver. This, however, was a lot not decreed for him. He had hardly finished his statement to the resident, Colonel Cheapstow, when he felt so ill, that the Colonel advised him, for the present, to take no further trouble in the matter, but rest himself for a few days, until he should recover from the effects of the exposure and fatigue he had undergone, and that in the mean time he thought Major Melville “ had better take the opinion of the Residency Surgeon Dr. M'Alpin, whose name at

once proclaims his country. He arrived in the country at an age when the habits and language are usually fixed, and you will perceive that Gaelic was his mother tongue, and that he perhaps never learned English, until it was necessary for his professional studies; but he has a good head and a kind heart, though he is something odd in his way of expressing himself; but you will be very safe in his hands; and if, as I suppose," Colonel Cheapstow continued, "O Meer Sing, should find Oude too hot for him after what has just happened, and should cross into the Company's provinces, a party must be sent after him from one of the near stations, and you will be relieved from this business."

Major Melville felt his illness increase so fast upon him, that he was under the necessity of following this advice; and, after thanking Colonel Cheapstow for his kindness, he begged permission to retire to the apartments prepared for him, and was on the next morning too ill to leave his room.

The resident represented, without delay, to

the court of Lucknow, the business upon which Melville was come, and willing as they were to punish the culprit who had destroyed the king's favourite elephant, they easily obtained the fullest power to take O Meer Sing wherever he was to be found. All were forbidden, on pain of sharing his fate, to offer him shelter or protection ; a price was set on his head, and a description of his person sent to the heads of the native police throughout Oude ; and in such circumstances it is almost impossible for an offender to escape.

Next morning at day-break, Major Melville received a visit from Dr. M'Alpin, who walked into his room, saying, " Weel, Major, here's anither het day. But how have ye passed the night ; had ye any guid o' the fine nor-wester ? The blasts that come from our own blue hills, put life in the veins o' a Scotchman. I've seen me lying on my braid back on the dining-table, under the punkah, ready to give up the ghaist, and no a leaf stirring at midnight, but the very earth smoking as if the flames wad burst up ; till rush, I heard the noise of the bonny blasts come

roaring from the north, 'wi' healing on their wings,' and a' the doors and windows go bang, as it wad bring the bungalow about my ears, and I felt in one minute a new man, and though I may almost say I had not a knife and fork in my hands for three days, and that nothing crossed my lips but cool claret, I have got up and called for a curry, and eat wi' as good relish as ever I did a kippered salmon after a day's fishing on the banks of Loch Broom. I wish we had, if it were but the tail of one, for our breakfast this blessed morning. Kedgeree, though nothing to be despised, is no just so natural to my stomach. My bath was so weel cooled by last night's storm, that I feel as caller as a trout."

The good doctor after feeling his patient's pulse, and satisfying himself that the north-wester during the night had not done much towards reducing it, gave it as his opinion, that he was suffering from the effects of an inward contusion received at the time of his unfortunate fall, and strictly forbad any attempt to leave his bed, observing at the same time, "They were

na wise, Major, who ordered you to rin thief hunting through the jungles. That black devil, O Meer Sing, is as supple as an eel; he'll rin fast that will shake salt on his tail. I have been at this court this twenty years, and never saw guid come o' man's exposing himself in the hot winds."

"But my duty, doctor," said Melville; "it is impossible to neglect duty."

"To obey the doctor is the patient's best duty, and without that let me tell you, Major, ye'll no soon be in condition for any other, so be still and think no more about it. What is done, cannot be undone, as I have heard my excellent mother say many a time, and I'll send you something, that will may be do you good;" with this promise he left the room.

Melville was, indeed, too seriously indisposed to continue the pursuit, and however unwillingly found himself under the necessity of reporting himself sick: knowing the misery such intelligence would occasion to his wife, when it reached Benares, he wrote to quiet her alarm, and informed her, that though he was certainly quite

unable to scour the jungles in the height of the hot winds, he was not seriously ill, and proposed, as soon as he could disengage himself from the hospitable kindness of Colonel Cheapstow, to return to Benares. He told her of the fall from his horse, and of O Meer Sing's generous interference in his favour, though he was certain from the glances he threw upon him, that he recognised him; but he said nothing of the Residency surgeon's opinion, that his present illness was in consequence of a contusion then received.

CHAPTER II.

Ye friends of my childhood, who shared in my pastime,
Far, far, now ye wander the wide world o'er ;
(Some shine in the zenith where fortune has placed them,
While others are wrecked on a far foreign shore.)
But oft ye 'll remember, in youth gladly sporting,
How sped the sweet hours, unknown to misfortune ;
And vainly ye 'll seek, while ambition you 're courting,
For moments like those ye have spent at Dunbar.

MOORE.

THE worthy doctor in the course of his attendance became very much attached to his patient, and spent an hour in his apartment whenever his other duties would permit. At the end of a week, finding him able to bear it, he took the opportunity of a large dinner party with the Resident to escape from table when the company moved after dinner to the next room, where the dessert and wine were served, leaving the servants to clear the table, and get rid of the fumes of dinner. The doctor ordered his hookahbadar, to carry his hookah to the apartment

of Major Melville Sahib, and passing through the outer hall, "Qui hi?" * he called aloud.

"Gulam hayer hi," returned half a dozen voices at once, "your slave waits."

"Order my kitmitgar to go to the abdar, and get a bottle of well-cooled loll, † burruf ki mof-fie, like ice, and bring it up stairs with my hookah."

"Liea, Sahib." "It is brought," returned the peon, ‡ as he went out with his orders.

"It is long, Major," said the doctor, as a bearer placed a chair for him by his friend's couch, while his hookahbadar placed his hookah as far as he could from the punkah, and folded a screen round it, to keep it from the air; "it is a long time since I have had the satisfaction to see a genuine countryman, though they say, that a crow and a Scotchman may be met with all the world over; and it just cheers my heart in this distant land, to speak of our own bonny glens and clear lochs, and to read what our own Byron, and Campbell, and Scott, have said of

* Who waits.

† Claret.

‡ A running messenger.

them. O, I remember the day in the hot winds, when I first saw the Lady of the Lake as if it was yesterday. I read, and I read, until I neither felt heat nor languor, till the lashing of the trees in the hot winds sounded like the roar of the battle, and the noise of conches like the Highland bag-pipe, and I got up and traversed my verandah with as light a step as if it had been the shore of Loch Broom."

"Yes," said Major Melville, "we, their countrymen on the plains of Hindostan, should present a letter of thanks to our own bards, for the pictures of our native land they have given, though half the globe lies between. How I have said,

‘Away, ye gay landscapes, ye gardens of roses,
In you let the minions of luxury rove;
O give me the rocks where the snow flake reposes,’

with a feeling which only a mountaineer in India can know; and then I have thought of ‘the pebbled and minnowy brooks,’ and the

‘Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood,’

with your enthusiasm, until the plains of Hin-

dostan were forgotten, and I only saw ‘my own, my native land.’ If I were able to drink wine, doctor, I would pledge you in a bumper, to the ‘border minstrel,’ and long may he sing the songs that reach across the seas.”

“Since I cannot permit you to do that, I will do it for you, Major,” said the doctor, filling his lumbah peallah,* and drinking it up. “O mony a crack I have had wi my trusty friend Dr. Leyden on this subject. O it was a pleasure to hear him sing our canty Scotch songs, and praise our dewy landscapes; and though he was from the border and me from the north, we did na forget to toast old Scotland when we met, and it’s grievous to think that he might have been with us this day, if he would have minded his doctors, and given over his books and his grammars when he was na able to sit in bed without pillows. I have a cannister of oatmeal sent to me by my excellent mother, and if ye were well enough, Major, I would have a cake baked for you. I have learnt my fellows to do

* Long glass.

that, but though I have often tried it, I never could compass a haggis. Here a Scotch taste is weary of curries, and kewabs, and pillaws, from June to January. Not that I say that they are bad neither, though they hae na just the relish of a well reisted deer ham. Another thing to be complained of at these burrow-connahs* is, that those who must not be named here have their chubberdars† amongst our servants, and every one knows that if he would keep his station, he must commune with his own thoughts, and be still; and, to tell you my mind, Major, I have been often so weary of this *gêne*, as the French call it, that if it were not for the weel paid rupees, I would turn my back on king and court, and return to the Company's stations, where a man may do what he likes, and speak what he pleases, without the fear of any black rascal making his own tale of it."

"The ceremony and restraint of a native court," said Melville, "are certainly very irksome,

* Great dinners.

† Carriers of news, usually retained in the pay of native princes.

and their system of espionage intolerable to us free-born Britons; still in your situation it is a thing of no consequence; the Company's officers are not under its influence."

"More, perhaps, than you think of; particularly *me*. A man of my profession must always be in great favour or the very reverse. For the good of my fortune the first is the case, though I cannot say it is for the ease of my body. A night hardly passes, with such a fraternity as those big walls inclose, but I am called out of my bed, to wait upon the whims of them who have nothing to do the live long day, but comb their locks and count their pearls. Many a queer thing passes yonder."

"It is well," returned Melville, "when a native prince sets his fancy upon a doctor, who will do all the good within his power, and not the evil."

"Aye, aye, Major, many an intrigue has been at work to set me out, but his majesty thinks that I have power to make the angel of death fly before me, because I helped him through a long fever, and the heir-apparent out

of the small-pox ; and now that I have got him persuaded to let the vaccination come amongst them, he thinks I deal in glamour, and intends to put my portrait in the great court picture, which, like Penelope's web, is always doing but never done."

"The painter must have a still harder task than the doctor," said Melville.

"Ye may say that ; if ye had seen the poor painter labouring, as I have, upon a canvas large enough to make a double-poled tent. He has orders to paint the king and all his court, and whenever any of the courtiers displease his majesty, he desires the painter to take out that man's head, and put in the new favourite ; and perhaps there are some heads taken off in reality in as little time as the painter can do it. I call this fine picture the barometer of royal favour, though, since our Government have had so much to say at this court, shearing heads, or even ears and noses, is na just so much the order of the day, as it used to be."

"We certainly do all in our power," answered Melville, "to prevent the natives taking

law into their own hands ; still the privacy and secrecy of their manners, and the impossibility of knowing how many persons compose their families, leave men of rank room enough to exercise the summary justice of which they are so fond."

"It's too true, Major, too true indeed ; many an act passes within those walls, with as much secrecy as in the dungeons of the inquisition, but hear to them now !" as a noisy procession passed the house, "what wi' their laments and their rejoicings, a man never can pass a quiet hour from sunset to sunrise. If they were playing any bonny airs, like our own 'Farewell to Lochaber,' or, 'Auld lang syne,' it would be something, but to hear them beating wi' their fingers on drums, and clattering things like fryingpans and pokers, it's more than a Scotch ear can weel bear."

"You forget, my good friend, that music is not their intention in these processions ; to attract the notice of the world by noise is all that they aspire to ; harmony is never to be looked for amongst them ; but I think you will

agree with me, that some of their melodies are extremely wild and beautiful, and the instruments with which they accompany their voices by no means unpleasing."

"I have thought that too; some of their romantic songs resemble our own Gaelic, particularly here in the upper provinces; the very air of the mountains gives something of their grandeur to all who live among them."

"The genuine sentiment of a highlander, 'who loves the hill that lifts him to the storm.' But I think that with your permission, doctor, I may move on the day after to-morrow, and shall give orders accordingly."

"Not so fast, not so fast; I will not be answerable for giving any permission of the kind, and here is the Colonel to judge between us. I have been telling the Major, Colonel, that he must give over thinking of running through the jungles at this season of the year, and ye are just come in time to back me with the weight of authority."

"Yes," said the Resident, who had come up stairs as soon as his friends had left him, "I have

obtained certain intelligence that this daring marauder has crossed into the Company's provinces, and that a detachment from Cawnpore has been sent out in pursuit of him, so you are fully and honourably relieved from this disagreeable duty, and I trust will give me the pleasure of your company, at least until our good friend the doctor permits you to move." Major Melville, after acknowledging the Resident's kindness, expressed his pleasure at being relieved from a service, which in his peculiar circumstances could not but be painful.

"That was a fine action," observed the doctor, "though it was O Mere Sing that committed it; and if it were not that it would cause the loss of many of our brave fellows, hunting after him in the holes and bores in which he will hide himself, I could find in my heart to wish that he might escape."

"Or be shot in the first rencounter," said the Colonel, "which he has equally well deserved."

"Any thing," said the doctor, "rather than be taken and hanged. I understand that he is a hill

man, and if that is the case, which it is likely to be from his gallant conduct yon day, I think he will never suffer himself to fall into their hands in life."

"Aye, aye," said the Colonel, nodding with a smile to Melville, "our friend the doctor has a countryman's feelings for this highland exploit; I find the knowledge that this rogue has been born in the hills, much alters his views of the matter."

"There's no use in denying that a highland man likes what belongs to the hills," said the doctor; "and since ye set me upon justifying my opinions, Colonel, I put it to yourself, whether a man who is rambling upon the mountains, and treading the clouds under his feet, and looking down upon the dusty earth and its flat ways, is na like to have some high thoughts, though, like the eagle, he may take the prey where he can find it."

"Well, well, I would rather dwell at a distance from such highland freedom."

"And me too, Colonel, for ye must not think

that I want to justify such ways, though I dinna like to think that a hill man, who risked his life for a brave enemy, should be put on a level wi' the cowardly inhabitants of the plains."

"No, no, doctor, no fear; if we catch him he will be exalted as high as Haman."

"It is humiliating to think, that a man capable of such soldierly bearing," said Melville, "should be stained with crimes which make us ashamed of the admiration we cannot withhold from him. But whatever he may be, I owe him gratitude."

Major Melville further learned from his host, that his friend Captain Bently, who had with his wife lately arrived at Cawnpore, was the officer appointed to command the detachment sent after O Meer Sing, and that Mr. Fortescue had been for some time at the station to act for the unfortunate Marriot. What had become of his guilty and miserable wife, no one could learn. The sepoy's under Lieutenant West's command, and his Mussulman servants, had, after the dreadful catastrophe which closed

the scene, made their way to the nearest station, but were unable to give any further account of Mrs. Marriot, than that the bearers had, by her own direction, taken her up in the palanquin, with the intention of carrying her to the nearest European habitation. Where they had found shelter, or what had become of her, could not be discovered, though Mr. Fortescue in his public capacity, and Colonel Howard in conformity with his promise to his departed friend, had made every inquiry. Her father, exasperated by her conduct, refused to acknowledge her, or permit her name to be mentioned in his hearing.

Numberless were the reports in circulation : it was confidently affirmed that she had died in the jungles ; that she had been carried off by a party of Mahratta horse, and had been seen tied across a saddle, with her head hanging down on one side, and feet on the other ; and that she had taken boat, and gone down to Calcutta, where she had embarked in an European ship, and sailed for England. After many fruitless efforts to ascertain the truth, the latter rumour,

as the most probable, seemed to gain general credit.

Melville, in his next letter to Flora, acquainted her with all these particulars, and his intention to avail himself of Colonel Cheapstow's kindness, and remain with him until the commencement of the rains had abated the intolerable heat. He knew that the return to Benares of the party he had commanded without him, would create the most anxious alarm in the mind of his wife, and he was, therefore, under the necessity of saying, that a slight intermitting fever, which he had prudently resolved to nip in the bud, had induced him to remain behind. He was almost disposed to follow Colonel Cheapstow's advice, and ask Flora to come to him, but the certainty that she must by such a request suppose him ill indeed, withheld him.

CHAPTER III.

Me glory summons to the martial scene,
The field of combat is the sphere for men ;
Where heroes war, the foremost place I claim,
The first in danger, as the first in fame.

POPE'S HOMER.

WHEN O Meer Sing's friends (and he had many in different parts of the country) found that in defiance of their counsel and advice he was resolved upon witnessing the elephant fight in full day light, they thought proper to take steps for facilitating his sudden retreat should it be necessary. It was always his custom wherever he went, to have his good black steed in waiting in case of need, and more than once his speed had served his master in his uttermost necessity. The boat already mentioned was manned by some of O Meer Sing's troop, disguised as fishermen ; they were ordered to lie upon their oars, while their nets were thrown out, as if following their occupation, and their

arms carefully primed and loaded were placed out of sight, but in readiness for use at a moment's warning.

On the opposite bank of the Ganges, Byram, the Lieutenant of the gang, waited in considerable anxiety, having dreamed, as he said, that evil would come of O Meer Sing's public exhibition, and when he saw his confederate advance in such haste, and they had both screened themselves from observation, in a clump of trees, where O Meer breathed his horse, Byram demanded of him, "Did I not speak well in warning you not to go there to day?"

"It was my pleasure to go: you see I have returned, and left them to grind their teeth for rage."

Byram merely asked the particulars, which the other as succinctly related. When he heard of Melville, he asked, "How he could bring such ashes on his own head; and for an enemy reduce himself to such straits?" The other answered carelessly, "that he never wished a brave man to die like a dog, and he hoped yet to measure his tulwar with him, and send him out of the

world in the way fighting men ought to go ; that for himself, he liked to make his name grow, and that over his life no one had power ; his *nisil* (fate) was written on his forehead at the hour of his birth, and he must go through it, and live until the appointed time."

As soon as O Meer Sing and Byram had settled their mutual plan of action, and named their point of meeting, for they both agreed that Oude could not be for the present a place of safety for either, they resolved in separate parties to gain the Marattah states, and keep quiet until the fame of this exploit should be blown by, and they might venture amongst their old friends again. O Meer Sing therefore stripped off all his ornaments, and changed his fine dress for one of coarser materials ; took from Byram a small bag of parched grain, and a leathern bottle filled with water, which he hung on his saddle bow, and thus provided he pursued his rapid journey. He travelled bye-routes and unfrequented paths, with which he was however well acquainted, and until midnight he did not dare to stop or rest his faithful steed, but then being

almost certain that he had far outstripped his pursuers, he ventured to take shelter under some thick trees on the borders of a large tank, first walking his horse for a short time that he might cool after his exercise, and then bathing both the faithful animal and himself in the tank, to refresh their weary limbs. He then took a portion of his parched grain, and gave some also to his steed, whom he, re-saddling, mounted and led under a thick tree, and having first examined and placed his arms in a commodious situation, he and his horse closed their eyes in sleep, though the ears of both were equally open to the slightest noise. He had chosen his present resting place as being in the neighbourhood of a large mosque, so surrounded by traps for wild animals that he hoped to pass the night without assault, and his success showed the wisdom of his choice, for he remained undisturbed until a few moments before day-break, when, knowing that the mosque would be soon crowded with worshippers, he again resumed his route. This day's journey lay through a more open country, and he feared the effects of the hot winds, both

for himself and his horse, and pushed on with all speed to gain a deserted ruin, where he proposed to shelter himself till sun-set, and take the advantage of the moon for a long stretch at night. After travelling by night or by day, as it suited his purpose, and taking care to avoid the grassy plains, which he knew to be the pasture of deer, and consequently the resort of animals of prey, he reached the banks of the Jumna, which he crossed without accident, and under favour of the night sheltered himself in one of the numerous monuments of Musselmanic splendour, which for miles surround Agra. This was an old and favourite resort, and had been useful on former occasions, and here he had deposited abundance of grain for his good steed, and the dress of a Musselman fakir, which he had before worn on a visit to his friend the Cutwab, who, as head of the police, had the power to assist him with very useful information in times of need. His first care was as usual to rub down and feed his horse, at the same caressing and speaking kindly to him, as if to thank him for past, and beg a continuance of future services. He then took

off his turban, which he fastened at his saddle bow, adjusted his arms and shook loose his long black hair, which he clotted with sand and mud, tangling it over his head so as to form a frightful bushy turban, daubed his face and neck, fastened an immense black beard upon his chin, and throwing the long party-coloured garment over his own clothes and arms, with which he never parted, and a large string of cowries about his neck, he underwent such a complete metamorphosis that his most intimate associates would have difficulty in recognising him if their suspicions were not excited: but in his case excessive caution was necessary, and he resolved to proceed with all the finesse which forms such a striking feature in native character.

The fame of O Meer Sing's exploit, and the loss of the Company's treasure under Lieutenant West's command, had been the theme of the whole country, and, even in his present disguise, O Meer Sing knew that it would not be prudent to present himself to his friend the Cutwab, while in company with others, knowing that he had to do with those who had their eyes open. He therefore

prudently waited at a distance until he saw Ali Cawn, who had been enjoying his evening conversation, left alone under the great tree, where the dignitaries of police often meet to talk over the news. He approached slowly, making grimaces to attract the attention of his friend, and when he had succeeded, made his private sign by which it had been agreed between them he should be recognised in all disguises. "My brother," said the Cutwab, in Hindostanee, speaking aloud for the edification of those who might be within hearing, "you seem to have travelled far, and none have given you bread to eat or water to drink. Let the light of your sanctity shine upon my house, and turn in and refresh you." "My brother," returned the fakir, "I am under a vow to sleep little and eat less, until I have performed a pilgrimage to the tomb where the light of nations, the most glorious Akbar, reposes at Secundra, yet at your word I will take the shelter in your house that my vow permits, provided that in your guest chamber there are no other guests. My vow does not allow me to look on any one, but him

whose salt I eat." " Silence and solitude shall be given for your meditation and prayer ; so come with me."

He rose with great majesty, and silently walked on before, while the fakir, with eyes fixed upon the ground, followed after, until they reached a large brick building, consisting of four equal sides, without windows on the outside. They entered by a large open arch like a *porte cochère*, and going up the steps on the left hand, the host ushered his guest into the fakir's chamber, or rather cell, a straight narrow place, lighted by a single window, and furnished with a rug upon which to sleep, and a pillow for the head.

Here the fakir declared aloud, to be heard by the servants, that " he would let down his *pardah*,* and sleep for one hour, in order to be able to give the rest to prayer, as he must renew his pilgrimage at day-break."

His host silently opened a small door in his cell which led into another apartment, and point-

* Screen.

ing to a door at the further end of it, which indicated to the fakir, "that way I come," shut it without noise; and calling to a Hindoo who waited in the entry, he brought in a soory* of water, and a dish of boiled rice, set both on the floor, and departed. O Meer Sing, though a Pindaree by profession, that is to say, a leader of banditti, was still a Hindoo of caste, and though he committed murders, and burnt villages, without losing his rank among his people, he could not pollute himself by eating dressed food from the hands of any but a Hindoo.

In a few minutes the door at the upper end of the room opened, the Cutwab's arm appeared, placing a bag of parched grain and sugar on the floor, and it was again shut. O Meer Sing eat his rice with good appetite, and finished his meal with a draught of cold water; then, knowing that he could not expect to see his friend until all was quiet, as the appearance of intercourse between them would excite suspicion, lay down to rest, and slept without moving, until a hand

* Vessel for water.

on his shoulder made him start up in the dark, and instinctively grasp his dagger, but before he had drawn it from his sheath, he recollected his situation, and in silence followed his conductor into the adjoining chamber, who, shutting the door as before, demanded in a low voice, "What could make him appear at such a moment as the present, when he must know that all the world was up in arms against him, and how he could suppose that he (Ali Cawn) could conceal him?"

"I know," said O Meer Sing, "that it is not the first time that you and I have blinded the whole world, nor will it be the last. Nothing can be easier than you keeping me quiet now. You have only to give me lodging to-morrow, and after that let the hunters come—the tiger is fled." "But who is to stand between me and the hunters?" demanded Cawn. "The doings of a great man like me cannot be hid, and I shall have trouble to account for this night's visit; it will cost me my place."

"Then," said O Meer Sing, seeing where the

difficulty lay, " I shall give you a lakh of rupees to pay the charges."

" Yes, my friend," said Cawn; " that is, when this trouble is past ; but as that is not likely, it would be wiser in me to wash my hands of the matter."

" No," said O Meer Sing, clearly perceiving that his good friend was balancing in his own mind the wisdom of trusting to chance and the word of a decoit for his lakh of rupees, or delivering him up and receiving half the sum as his certain reward ; but knowing that he was completely in his power, he continued, " No wise man washes his hands when he has rupees to receive, and, if you doubt my word, meet me to-morrow night in the gardens of the Taje, and your eyes shall convince you."

" Did you say a lakh of rupees ? " demanded Cawn.

" Yes ; I said a lakh of rupees ; and if I do not give them into your own hands to-morrow night in the Taje gardens, then deliver me into the hands of the sepoy as a warning to all those who break faith : and they would every one

of them be as glad of it as they are to take their rest after a long day's march."

"And if I do run such a risk for you," said the Cutwab, "where are you to hide yourself during the day? You know my house is no place for a fakir after sunrise."

"That I must trust to your wisdom," replied O Meer Sing, well knowing that he was quite safe in the custody of Cawn, until the money was paid.

"And if I do find a place for you, what will you do with yourself after?" asked Cawn.

"I cross down to Oude," said O Meer Sing, endeavouring to mislead his interrogator, being always unwilling that his friends should know more of his movements than was required for his assistance. "When the first blaze of anger is burnt out, I shall be forgotten."

"Well, well," said Cawn, "I must take care of you this day, and though you perform your part well, I would advise you not to show yourself to too many eyes. You can before sunrise follow me into the fort, as if you were going to worship at the Pearl Mosque. Do not come

too near me, but observe the way I take, and I shall find a place for you. Now sleep," and, without adding a word, Cawn opened the door into the fakir's cell, and when his guest had entered, shut it in silence, and departed.

As soon as O Meer Sing found himself alone, he stole softly out to visit his faithful steed, and provided for his comfort. He knew that he had work to perform which would try his mettle, and though, like his master, he could do upon occasion with little of either sleep or food, yet, when it was in his power, his master wished to give him the refreshment of both. O Meer, however, took care, when he was in sight of his friend's house, to prostrate himself as if in prayer, well knowing that if he was observed, the act of seeking a solitary place for his devotion was but a duty incumbent on a good Musulman. When he had caressed and fed his favourite, he returned by the route he went, not forgetting to prostrate himself, with his face to the east as he observed the first stroke of dawn mark the horizon. His host appeared at the

same time completely armed, and with great dignity proceeded to the fort. The sentinels all made their salaams as he passed on to the beautiful white marble mosque, built by one of the Mogul emperors, in the days of their splendour, for his private devotions. Here he prostrated himself, with his forehead on the earth, now and then raising his face to catch the first rays of the rising sun. The fakir did the same, but whether his prostrations were longer, with the intention to conceal himself from the observation of the crowd of worshippers, or in greater fervour, is only known to himself; though his forehead was in the dust, he still kept an observant eye upon the movements of his protector, who, when he had finished his morning service, walked away with the same gravity that he had all along supported. When he had got to a sufficient distance, O Meer Sing rose and followed him, with his eyes fixed on the ground, until they reached the rampart of the fort in which the royal Ackbar had dwelt in splendour. Cawn mounted to that part of it which commands the river and adjacent country, and

walked directly up to the black marble musnud,* on which Ackbar, the greatest of Mussulman Emperors used to receive petitions, and reverentially made his salaams before it. This rampart descends one hundred and twenty yards perpendicularly into the bed of the Jumna, whose waters on this side wash the walls of the fort.

On this elevated spot the King of Nations had been in the habit of enjoying the evening air, and looking down upon the countries over which he bore sway. His long and prosperous reign, and many acts of public munificence, are not yet forgotten in Hindostan, and even to this day no native treads the rampart where he once sat in regal power, without making profound salaams to the musnud. The strong fort of Agra had always been the favourite residence of the Mogul emperors, and by them had been adorned with everything which wealth could purchase or luxury invent. When Ali Cawn had greeted the empty throne with these marks of respect, he

* Throne.

turned into the private apartments of royalty, his satellite still following, and crossed through the magnificent baths and dressing-rooms, the floors, walls, and ceilings of which were all equally beautiful, inlaid in the richest and most exquisite mosaic; every flower, and even every turn in every leaf, was faithfully represented in coloured stones of every hue. Beautiful as these apartments were, they did not attract a moment's notice from those who crossed through them, and descended by a long staircase in perfect darkness to the emperor's noon-day apartment for the hot winds. It was considerably under ground, without window or opening, save ventilators and the door by which they had entered, and, like the rest, was altogether marble, from the roof to the floor. Several fountains cast up their cooling waters into richly-wrought basins, which overflowed with a murmuring sound, and ran off in little channels cut in the marble floor. Couches of the same material were placed in different directions. The richly-wrought gold and silver branches by which it had been lighted had long since shared the fate

of the silver roofs of the great halls, which had been torn down by the victors and shared as plunder, when the British arms put an end to the Mogul dynasty.

When Cawn found himself in this place of security and repose, he took from under his chudder a small dark lantern, and having made the circuit of the place, and looked behind every fountain and couch, to ascertain that they were alone, he gave it to O Meer Sing, bidding him at the same time remember the Taje at sunset, and advising him to keep quiet and turn his lantern, if the slightest noise gave warning of approaching footsteps. "In the heat of the day, perhaps some of the people of the garrison may choose to repose here, but with the little light they can take, you will never be discovered in a place of this size. Keep behind a fountain, and if you are observed, alone, and in the dark, it is natural that a devout fakir should seek such a retirement."

Ali Cawn then produced a small phial, and desired O Meer Sing to swear, by the most binding Hindoo oath, the holy water of the

Ganges, that he would never, in the greatest extremity, profit by or reveal the secret with which he was now going to intrust him. O Meer Sing took the prescribed oath, and solemnly denounced vengeance on his own head if ever he broke it.

“News is come to me,” Cawn then continued, “that those will be here to-night whom it would be unsafe for you to meet, and as you and I must meet in the Taje gardens before the moon rises, mark the way you must come, and fail me at the peril of your head.”

O Meer Sing's black eyes flashed fire, and the intention of murdering Cawn upon the spot and instantly making his escape crossed his mind, as he surmised that his friend was but betraying him into a trap, which would close upon him as soon as his money was paid. The thought, however, was but for a moment; he felt the impossibility of accomplishing his purpose and making his escape at that hour of the day, when all men, Hindoos as well as Mussulmans, were abroad at their devotions. He therefore resolved to keep faith, which might be use-

ful to him another time, and trust to fate and his own ingenuity for deliverance.

“Cawn,” he said, drawing himself up with a haughty air, “I have set villages in flames, and slaked them with blood, but I have never broken faith solemnly pledged. You shall have your money, but I shall accompany you out of the Taje gate; and, if there are those there who ought not to be there, your rupees shall be their spoil, and your soul the devil’s.”

Cawn bit his lip and curled his mustachios in wrath, but he felt that this was not the time to give it vent; and he knew that he would have time enough to arrange his plans of revenge afterwards. In the mean time, O Meer Sing’s lakh must be secured; if he was taken before, its payment would die with him; that done, he had too many satellites to dread his escape. He contented himself, therefore, with saying, “By the head of Mohammed, I could in one hour hang you up to feast the Brahminee kites, and have thanks for my zeal; but you have eaten my salt, and are safe. Follow me.”

He pressed upon a spring in the wall, and an

admirably-constructed door in the marble flew open, which discovered a long passage. Cawn held up the lantern, and said, "Follow this, and it will lead again out, under the walls of the fort, by a long route, to the sepulchre in the Taje; but remember your oath, and, whatever may happen to you afterwards, never, without my permission, make use of this secret."

O Meer Sing promised "to follow his directions, and never to forget his oath." It was curious to see two men, unrestrained by any feeling but that of self-interest from murdering each other on the spot where they stood, talking of oaths and promises; yet such is the empire of opinion. Cawn again pressed upon the spring, and the door moved upon its noiseless hinges, and shut as before, and he asked with a significant air, "Where do you intend at present to eat the air?" To this O Meer returned a vague answer, saying, "That must depend upon the will of others—not mine." O Meer Sing, as soon as Ali Cawn had departed, eat his parched grain and sugar, and slaked his thirst with the fountain flowing at his side. He

longed to plunge into it and refresh himself by bathing, but he dreaded to efface the clay-marks by which he had disguised himself, and, by appearing too clean, betray his imposture. Knowing the work he had to do, and his need of strength to perform it, he stretched himself down to sleep, resolving to rest until three o'clock in the afternoon, when he knew that the heat would close even the most watchful eyes. He laid himself across the door of his exit, to prevent the possibility of his missing it in the dark, and fell into a profound sleep, so completely had habit and necessity given him power over himself.

Notwithstanding the dreadful heat of the season of the year, in that place a cooling air was always circulated by numerous well-contrived ventilators; and at the fixed hour O Meer Sing awoke, new strung in every joint, and fresh for the perils he had to encounter. Taking his lantern in his hand, he opened the door, and, shutting it after him, followed the winding passage, which descended upon one side, and ascended upon the other, under the ramparts.

He travelled fast, without any obstruction, for a very considerable distance, until he found his progress barred by a door exactly similar to that by which he had entered. After listening for some time to discover if there was any sound, he pressed the spring, and, turning his dark lantern, ventured to look forward into what he knew to be the vault where the body of Arjemund Banu, or, as her husband had ordered her to be styled, *the most exalted of the age*, reposes in state. All was silent; not a sound was to be heard but the cooing of a solitary turtle dove. He stepped cautiously forward, with his naked feet, and softly turned the door behind him upon its silent hinge; well knowing that the slightest sound from that echoing vault would run round the building above, and fill the lofty dome. It had been purposely contrived to add solemnity to the scene. The body lay enshrined within a sumptuous screen of richly inlaid mosaic, and a flight of stone steps led from the vault where it was deposited (in the centre under the dome) to the splendid mausoleum above.

O Meer Sing gazed watchfully around, to

ascertain that he was alone; for though it would have been no unusual sight to see a fakir in the Taje, he had that to do which would be best without witnesses. He crossed the marble floor, and glanced through the splendid edifice, which shone in the full light of blazing noon. As in the palace, floor, walls, roof, were all of the same exquisitely inlaid mosaic; every leaf and every flower has been faithfully represented by the hands of such cunning workmen, that it seems as if

“A fairy spell the change hath wrought.”

Cornelians, agates, and precious stones of every colour, form wreaths of flowers, which sparkle with all the richness, and more than the durability, of those objects in nature; two hundred years have passed, and they are still as fresh as when they first came from the hands of the artists. Nothing has been spared to render this a fitting rest for her who, by a husband's love, was exalted above all Eastern women.

This princely tomb was erected by the emperor Shah Jehan, in memory of a wife constantly beloved while living, and sincerely mourned

when dead; an affection which is more to her honour as it lasted twenty years, and is perhaps as uncommon in the domestic annals of India as the pompous monument which has made it known to the world. It was the intention of Shah Jehan to have built a similar mausoleum for himself, exactly opposite to the Taje Mahl, upon the other side of the river, connecting both by a bridge over the Jumna, but death removed him before he could make such a splendid addition to the magnificent monuments of arbitrary power with which Agra and Delhi are surrounded, monuments as gigantic as the power which raised them, and which are mouldering down as certainly as tyrannic sway falls before the light of reason and revelation. O Meer Sing found himself quite alone, and escaped without observation through the ground entrance into the spacious garden which surrounds the building, and which is itself enclosed by high walls and gateways large enough to admit several troops of cavalry. The garden was fantastically arranged. Numerous fountains threw up their limpid waters, which fell sparkling into

little canals of good mason work, and flowed through the ground, to water the extensive plantations of roses which perfumed the air. Several of these fountains still continue to play; others, choked by the dust of ages, have become perfectly dry. It was to one of these, in a sequestered part of the garden, that O Meer Sing now bent his way, having first explored every bush and thicket in his neighbourhood, to ascertain that he was without witnesses, and then, raising a stone concealed by fallen rubbish, he discovered what in former times had been the reservoir of the fountain, but what was now converted into one of his treasures. He took the specified sum in gold from his store in small canvas bags, and deposited it amongst the rubbish above, shut down the entrance and replaced every thing over it, just as he found it, before he proceeded to remove this treasure to the appointed spot.

He next proceeded to look after his gallant steed Ally Buxus, well knowing the demands he would have to make on his wind and mettle; he passed out among the slumbering dragoons, in-

dolently reclined upon their charpoys under the great gateway, without exciting the least notice. Having fed his horse, saddled him, and set additional pistols on the saddle-bow, to be ready at a moment's notice, he retraced his steps again, and reached the Taje just as the moon began to cast her pale light over the white marble monument, which like snow reflected back her steady ray. In gliding along in the dark shadow which the building cast, O Meer Sing observed a solitary figure, which he at once recognized to be his friend Ali Cawn, but without taking any notice of him, as there were several fakirs belonging to the place sitting in the moonlight, performing their evening devotions, he bent his way by the opposite side, until he reached the place; but he did not venture to approach it directly until as before he reconnoitred every bush and tree. When he had satisfied himself, he took his seat in silence upon the spot to wait Cawn's approach, who detained him no longer than, in case they might have been observed, to do away the suspicion of design in their meeting.

“ Here is your pay,” said O Meer Sing, “ but

it is too heavy to be moved at one time; what are you to do with it?"

"Leave that to me," said the other, "and bethink you of yourself."

"You know that I am to have your company, Ali Cawn, without the Taje, and I can divide the weight with you."

"No," replied Cawn; "it is impossible to travel at this hour with such a sum. Go alone, and leave me to dispose of it."

"Nay, by the beard of my father, I shall have your safe conduct without the walls. Do you think that I am weary of my life, that I should attempt to get out of this toil alone? I see the trap you have set, but take good advice, though from an interested person, and be contented with what you have got. If I fall it shall not be singly. I hear sounds at the gate by which we entered, which warn me that it is time to be gone. I have told you already, and I repeat it, that the money is yours, if you keep faith, but if you attempt to break it, this," and he drew from under his robe a finely wrought pistol, "shall settle it."

Ali Cawn finding that his friend was before hand with him, again made show of confidence, and answered calmly, "Your troubles have disturbed your reason, else you would not distrust your best friend."

He then hastily replaced his bags in the hiding place from whence O Meer Sing had taken them, and seemed almost as anxious as his comrade, to get clear of the place. Hurrying to a part of the wall which lay in the deep shade of several tall trees, he pointed out a spot to O Meer Sing, where they both scraped up the loose rubbish from the foundation of the wall, and discovered an opening, large enough for a man's body to pass through.

"Go out here," said Cawn; "and go quickly."

"You go first," returned the other, "and show me the way;" and, drawing his pistol from his belt, followed so closely, as to leave no time for the execution of hostile intentions in Cawn, if he had any. They both stopped to take breath on the outside of the garden.

"Who goes there?" demanded the sentry upon duty.

“A friend,” replied Ali Cawn, shouldering his tulwar, and stepping out into the moonlight, while O Meer Sing glided off in the shadow and disappeared round the nearest corner. He then stripped off his fakir’s robe, which was a great incumbrance to his flight, and flinging it into the river to mislead his pursuers, threw himself flat on the ground, and crept along the sand, that for more than a hundred yards lay full in the moonlight. As soon as he again got under shadow, he started upon his feet, and fled to the ruin, where his horse stood ready, leaving his pursuers again at fault.

CHAPTER IV.

How beautiful on yonder casement pane
The mild moon gazes ! Mark
With what a lonely and majestic step
She treads the heavenly hills !
And oh ! how soft, how silently she pours
Her chasten'd radiance on the scene below ;
And hill, and dale, and tower,
Drink the pure flood of light.

HENRY NEELE.

WHEN the Resident found that the court of Lucknow was really interested in the apprehension of the robbers, he justly concluded that O Meer Sing too well understood his own danger to trust himself any longer in Oude, and therefore sent information of what had happened to all the nearest stations, that they might take proper steps to prevent his escape. A very few days after Bently's arrival at Cawnpore he was sent out upon this service ; and as

O Meer Sing's connection with Agra was more than suspected, he directed his march towards that fortress, arrived at the Taje gardens before O Meer Sing quitted them, and caused the sound which hastened his flight.

Ali Cawn, who had his scouts out in every direction, well knew every movement of the Company's troops, and had received private intelligence which led him to fear that his connection with the decoits was no secret : he resolved therefore to throw dust in the eyes of the Company Sahib, as he expressed it; and as soon as he had fairly secured O Meer Sing's gold mohors, he would play the faithful servant and give him up, receiving his share of the price set upon his head. He felt perfectly conscious, that if such a service was rendered, no one would take the trouble to inquire what passed before it, and his face would shine in greater favour than ever.

To this purpose he held a little private communication with the havildar of Bently's party, and endeavoured to ascertain from him the ground on which he trod; he knew there was not a moment to be lost, and finding that he

was unseen, he walked boldly up to Captain Bently, with several profound salaams, wishing that his head might touch the heavens, that his name might fill the earth, and that his children might be as the stars in heaven. He then proceeded to inform him ; “ your slave has neither eat by day nor slept by night, since he heard the great news ; his heart has been heavy for his Lord’s loss, and he has been warned in a dream that this night the thief will appear in the disguise of a better man.”

Bently’s acquaintance with native character led him at once to see the part which Cawn was disposed to take, and he answered, “ Whoever will seize him, or assist in giving such information that he may be seized, shall receive the reward which Government has ordered. He and his gang have committed so many murders, in addition to this daring robbery, that every true servant is anxious to clear himself from the ashes which this man’s being at large heaps upon his head.”

“ Your slave thinks that his lord’s men will stay in the quarters at the front gate of the

Taje ; and your slave will watch when the shadows fall to bring his lord good tidings."

The wily Cutwab calculated upon first placing his gold mohors in safety, and then pointing out to the party, who were upon the alert, the route O Meer Sing had taken. The determination of the latter, to have his company in passing out of the fort, greatly disconcerted all his well laid schemes. If O Meer Sing was taken in his company, revenge would doubtless lead him to betray the transaction, so that his loss would infinitely exceed his gain. On the other hand, if he overlooked his flight, after what had passed, he would lose his place with disgrace, and his share of the government reward also. A middle course presented itself to his ready wit, by which he could accomplish all, and he was no sooner certain that O Meer was clear of the gardens, than he returned to the grand gateway, and gave information that he had been upon the watch for some hours and observed a person to steal out upon the opposite side, with such caution, that he had followed him, and though he was in a fakir's dress, he remarked enough to

make him certain that it was the disguise which he had seen in his dream. The pretended fakir, he said, ran towards the river as fast as his legs could carry him, which would certainly never have taken place unless he had been upon other work than his prayers at the mosque.

Bently made instant search in the direction Cawn had mentioned, and the fakir's coat was found floating down the river, which, with the footmarks upon the sand, gave authentic confirmation of the truth of Ali Cawn's report. Finding that he had in some measure re-established his doubtful credit with the sepoy, and knowing that O Meer had time enough to be out of their immediate reach, he scrupulously continued his investigation: "Look here, sahib," he said, "here a man has crossed the sand flat on his stomach; here is his track like a serpent's in the dust; and here he has got on his feet again."

"Yes," said Bently; and here is the path he has taken."

The sepoy all anxiously followed like hounds upon the scent, and the moon, which was now high, showed the foot prints clearly in the sand.

They continued this kind of pursuit and examination for some time, until they began to get entangled in the ruins, and Captain Bently, apprehensive that some of the gang might be concealed, then halted, and forming his men into double files, proceeded to examine the ruins as far as it was in their power, by a light which, however brilliant when it shone, cast deep shadows from the tall buildings by which they were surrounded, and obliged them to tread with caution for fear of falling into an enormous well, or disappearing through ruinous subterraneous passages.

The moon streamed full upon the Cutlub Minar, which reared its tall and elegant form, lightly touched by the hand of time, high above the rest of the ruins. The marks of feet in the sand around it, induced the party to enter cautiously. The moon-beams strayed through the arched windows, casting a clear light upon the floor in long lines, and leaving the rest of the place in darkness; they stopped for a moment to listen, but no sound disturbed the still midnight. Bently fancied he observed something

to move in the darkest corner ; and Cawn, who was by his side, still anxious to show his zeal, and do away former suspicion, started forward to ascertain what he meant. He trod upon something which moved under his foot with a rushing sound, and nearly threw him down ; he stepped into the moonlight, and in an instant an enormous snake whose tail he had hurt, threw itself upon him, twisting round his body like a corkscrew, and pinioning his raised arm, which grasped his tulwar, close to his head, over which the reptile raised his horrid crest, in the act of striking. With the same celerity that the snake had thrown himself upon the devoted Cawn, the native officers drew their tulwars, and with simultaneous strokes cut through his twisted links, which fell at the feet of the astonished Ali Cawn in a hundred pieces. Captain Bently could hardly credit the evidence of his own eyes, so rapidly had the scene passed before him, or believe that the horrid monster, who a moment before, had opened his venomous jaws, and hissed over his victim with the malignity of a demon, now lay literally hacked to pieces at his feet.

Convinced from this incident that the Minar was unfrequented, he searched no farther, and when he had mustered his men upon the plain, was upon the point of retracing his steps, when one of the sepoys, who had straggled a little out of the line, observed the print of a horse's feet in the sand, and communicated his observations to his leader. Bently followed the track, which conducted the party to a larger and more ruinous building than any they had yet entered; the steps, still distinctly visible, led them across an open court, and into a little apartment, the door of which was concealed by hanging shrubs and plants, which seemed to have been lately brushed aside. An aperture in the roof admitted the clear moonlight, which plainly showed a bed of dry leaves upon which a horse had lately rested, and a grain bag still wet, from which he had eaten. "What is this?" said Ali Cawn, as he took up the good black beard of his absent friend, off the withered leaves where it had fallen, "by the head of the prophet, the beard of a fakir, matted with sand and mud."

"We are right then," said Captain Bently ;

“ this has been his haunt, and from the appearance of the place, his horse has been in it for a considerable time; therefore, must be perfectly refreshed and able to continue his journey.”

“ Yes, sahib,” said the subadar * respectfully, “ and if it is the same black horse that carried him clear off from Lucknow, and through the dowab,† he will carry him like a thunderbolt on the wings of the lightning. I heard news of that horse, from one who was there to see.”

Ali Cawn, on examining the place with the greatest minuteness, discovered the dark lantern which he had himself given to his confederate in the Emperor's summer apartments, a discovery which however he kept to himself, wisely thinking it might lead to inquiry, which might give trouble. “ Since that is the case,” resumed Bently to the subadar, “ nothing more can be done to night,” and he gave orders for the return of his party to the fort.

Cawn was provoked to think that his ancient

* Native Captain.

† The provinces between the Ganges and Jumna.

ally should have kept the circumstance of his having his valuable horse with him a profound secret, as well as his place of resort, which he judged from circumstances was not a chance refuge, and he determined to take no farther notice at this time, but return at a more convenient opportunity, and make a particular survey of the locality, not without hopes of finding something to reward him for his trouble. Ali Cawn was an old fox, who had long shared in O Meer Sing's spoil, and who well knew that though he often went out and returned, his earth would be one day shut against him, and had predicted that it would certainly be the case, if he attempted to meddle with the Company. O Meer Sing's love of money and of enterprise, had led him to disregard this prediction, but it was now fulfilled, and Ali Cawn, since he could not avert the fate which hung over him, and consequently had no hopes from his future exploits, saw no reason why he should not be in at the death, and by so doing, whitewash his character for integrity. That was a little tarnished in the hard struggle it had been subjected to, and required

a brilliant effort on his part; a little twinge of conscience for a moment disturbed him, but he quieted it, by reflecting that O Meer Sing's "*Nisib* was upon his forehead, and that what was determined must take place;" and then, any action of his had no power to shorten an hour of his friend's useful life, though it would make his own name to shine. Such reasoning was opiate enough to quiet compunctious visitings of a stronger nature than any Ali Cawn had ever experienced, and he returned to his house, after he had parted with Captain Bently (who had thanked him for his useful assistance), not a little charmed with his address, in having managed so wisely, that let things go as fortune pleased, they must turn to his advantage. If O Meer Sing made good his escape he was entitled to his gratitude; if he was taken he would be entitled to some reward for the information he had furnished; and, at all events, he was reinstated in the good opinion of his honourable employers, as Captain Bently had promised to mention his name in his letters on service.

Ali Cawn, however, wise as he esteemed him-

self, had met with his match. O Meer Sing, foreseeing the part he was likely to take, and what would happen in consequence, hastened to the ruins, and as has been already seen, removed his favourite horse to another convenient spot at some distance. Fearing to get entangled amongst the ruins with which Agra is surrounded, or fall in with the armed patrols which guard them, if he attempted to proceed with unusual haste, and fully satisfied that his pursuers would be deceived by his finesse, he resolved, if possible, to hear their resolutions and be directed by them. For this purpose he returned to the place from which he had just taken his horse; and going round upon the dark side of the building, where his footsteps could not be seen, scrambled by the help of the bushes, with which it was overgrown, upon the top of the place; then laying himself flat down upon the terrace near the opening, where he could hear and not be seen, he listened attentively to all that passed below. When his friend Ali Cawn picked up the *ci-devant* fakir's beard and presented it to Captain Bently,

O Meer Sing made in his own mind a vow, which he was not likely to forget, to take vengeance on such treachery. When they were leaving the ruins, he overheard Bently give Ali Cawn a private order to repair to Secundra, and from a person there whom he indicated, procure certain information which he was to transmit to Captain Bently, at a place which he named.

“There then,” thought O Meer Sing, “you shall hear farther of me;” and his eyes flashed with the look peculiar to them, though no muscle moved in his whole body, nor did he scarcely dare to respire for fear of betraying himself. Could Ali Cawn have seen him at that moment he would have had as much reason to dread the still and terrible vengeance brooding there, as he had the fangs of the snake when its coil was wreathed round his body.

O Meer Sing, when Captain Bently and his party had got to a little distance, stood upright upon the roof to watch that no straggler might remain to interrupt his plans; and as soon as he had satisfied himself that they were fairly

out of sight and hearing, descended from his hiding place, ran to the spot where he had left his horse, and vaulted into his saddle, speaking a few words of encouragement to his dear ally, Buxus, who, refreshed by food and rest, started forward like the wind, his rider almost joying as much in his projected revenge as he had done in his successful attack upon the treasure party. Once, and once only, he was challenged by the patrole, as he came suddenly in contact with them in descending a deep ravine. "Who goes there?" demanded the foremost horseman, presenting his piece.

"A friend," replied O Meer Sing.

"The word," again demanded the other.

"Secundra, and be silent," replied O Meer Sing with ready memory, giving that which he had heard between Captain Bently and Ali Cawn.

"Pass on," answered the inquirer, "and good fortune attend you."

"Salaam, brother," returned O Meer Sing, mounting the opposite bank, and he was out of sight in an instant.

The northern provinces of India (being always subject to the incursions of Pindarees, Mahrattahs, and freebooters of every description) must be at all times as much in a state of military surveillance, as if they were actually the seat of war. When O Meer Sing had in his fakir's disguise, informed Ali Cawn that he intended to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of the royal Akbar at Secundra, nothing was farther from his thoughts than going there; but the conversation he had overheard in the ruin, changed his intention, and filled him with such a burning thirst of revenge, that he was ready to keep in a route which he knew to be full of danger to himself, for its gratification. His predatory habits had given him a perfect acquaintance with all the castes of people who made their livelihood by length or power of arm; and in the present instance he resolved to avail himself of instruments which, in other circumstances, he would have despised. He therefore in the morning struck into the great road to Delhi, and had not travelled far upon it, when he observed tokens which made him

conjecture that those he sought were at no great distance. He remarked on a little plain to the left of his road, that there was the appearance of an encampment which had been just struck, and from the loneliness of the situation this excited a suspicion. When he rode up to the spot to verify it, there he saw several cooking vessels strewed about, the embers of different fires, and what was more to his purpose, the earth in three or four places bore the appearance of having been lately turned up and carefully smoothed down again. Here then, it was plain, a pretty numerous gang of phansygars * had encamped, and here they had inhumed their victims. Having satisfied himself of these facts he returned to the main road, and having carefully reconnoitered the dust, was confirmed in the opinion, that those he meant to use as the instruments of his revenge, had gone before him. He travelled on in the same direction for several hours, until the sun and the wind became so insupportably hot, that he was under the neces-

* Professional murderers.

sity of seeking some shelter for himself and his horse, in which to pass the day. He was hastening forward to some old Hindoo temples, which, from their decayed state were completely deserted, when, turning a sharp corner near a thicket, he observed a young woman seated upon the road side, beating her breast, and weeping most bitterly.

As soon as she saw him she begged earnestly that he would take her up behind him, to the next serai, * where she expected to find her friends, who had been put to flight by the thieves, who had taken her dooly, and robbed her of every thing she possessed.

O Meer Sing for a moment stopped his rapid course to listen to her tale, taking care, however, not to come near her, and when in the warmth of her entreaties, she started upon her feet, he moved to a still greater distance, and kept a watchful eye upon the thicket, upon his left.

Seeing his distrustful movement, she seated

* Caravansera.

herself again on the ground, wrung her hands with the appearance of the most unaffected sorrow, and said, in a tone of entreaty and reproach, "Surely, my lord will not leave his slave to die of hunger and thirst in the public way? Omercy, mercy, only take me to the serai!"

"My business presses," answered the wary O Meer, "and my worn horse cannot carry double; but there is one follows me at a more easy pace, who will better suit your purpose; and who is rich enough to replace what the thieves have taken. I am a poor soldier, and have only this," presenting a pistol, as she again made an attempt to draw near him.

"And a hard, and a cruel heart," returned the baffled damsel, seating herself with the same sorrowful air as before; "but does your friend come alone, or has he those with him who may help to get back my goods?"

"My friend is rich and takes gold for his offering, therefore it is likely he will not be alone; he was to leave Agra, this morning, and must be here to-morrow, so you will not have long to wait." He made the accustomed signal to

his horse, who moved forward at his usual pace; and when he had fairly lost sight of the thicket and those it might contain, he sought the proposed shelter, where he passed the day; giving his horse a little of his parched grain and opium, and permitting him to pick dry grass and leaves in the ruinous enclosure.

The distressed damsel, on her side, as soon as the impenetrable O Meer had disappeared, dried her tears and sought the thicket, where her associates waited the result of her wiles.

“Success is not with you for once, Rizia?” said the foremost, who had all the dress and appearance of a common travelling pedlar.

“Your words are true,” she answered, “the tiger is not to be caught by the lynx; but though he is not the prey, he has pointed out where the deer lies;” and she repeated the conversation that had passed between herself and O Meer Sing.

“Rizia,” answered her comrade, when he had listened to all, and considered it attentively; “you have met with craft beyond your own;

this man knows who he has to deal with ; and intends to deliver you over to the police.”

“ No,” answered the young woman, “ if he knew me, it is revenge that makes him seek to give this traveller into my hands. I remarked the fire that burned in his eyes, when he spoke of him.”

“ It may be ; we shall see ; but the business requires wisdom, and must be managed with caution ;” and calling a general council, the whole crew squatted down to debate upon the means to be followed.

Their numbers at that time amounted to about twenty ; but as they had made several very successful attacks, and amassed a great deal of booty, with which, as merchants, they had resolved to repair to a distant market, they were conscious that a considerable number of the gang must be left with the goods, and if any new enterprise of moment was attempted, more men would be required. They had, before O Meer passed, determined to rest satisfied with the plunder already in their possession, but the sight of a single horseman was to them

temptation irresistible ; and his fine steed would be an invaluable acquisition in their present circumstances. His speed precluded the possibility of coming up with him in the ordinary way ; they therefore had recourse to the wiles of Rizia, a beautiful Circassian girl whom they had, according to their custom, stolen from her parents at three years of age, and trained up to their profession. Many an unhappy horseman had her well acted distress lured to his destruction ; for with those alone who were well mounted, was it necessary to have recourse to her arts. In the present instance, however, they had been tried upon one too wary and too experienced to be gulled by them, though none who had ever fallen into her toils, had escaped to tell how they had been deceived. The mention of other travellers having horses, which they so much needed for the transport of their effects, was a chance worth looking after, and as the first step, they made their own private signals on the road by which they passed, to signify to any of their fraternity who might pass, the route they followed, and

the number of hands they wanted. When horsemen were to be attacked, they never made the attempt without the full complement; three of their own gang to each traveller; a mode of proceeding which may perhaps account for the number of years such a detestable and atrocious system has been carried on in India. These wretches, bred almost from their cradle to their accursed profession, are never tempted to make an attack until they are in numbers and a situation likely to secure their success. They will follow travellers for weeks, and if they find themselves too weak in number, make the signals for re-inforcements of their own gang, only known to themselves, and patiently wait until they arrive; strictly adhering to the fundamental rules of their society, that no murder is to be committed within two hundred miles of the phansygar villages, where they live as farmers. No booty is ever to be sold, within some hundred miles of the spot where it was captured; and no earthly inducement is to cause them to spare the lives of those they have once attacked, nor are they even to use fire arms, or depart

from their own distinctive weapons. The preconcerted plan of this dreadful fraternity was, that on a given day, all their different parties, who were out in every direction, traversing the provinces of Asia, should meet in a particular haunt in the jungle near Delhi, which was a well-known rendezvous, bringing with them all the plunder they had taken, there to be examined, classed, and divided into separate bales, like the merchandize of regular traders; and distributed to different gangs, who were, in the disguise of merchants, to carry the whole to the great fair of Hurdwar, which is the central ground where all the nations of India may meet. At such rendezvous the cattle taken underwent a general metamorphosis; bullocks were deprived of their horns, white beasts were dyed black, and light manes and tails stained blue or red, and in general, so complete was the change, that it would have been impossible for the owners to recognise them. Every individual article underwent a scrupulous investigation, and all precise marks were carefully effaced. The clothes of the victims were made

over to those who were to act as old clothes dealers; jewels to jewellers, and the arms to armourers. From the time the arrangements were completed, and the distribution made, the parties strictly kept to their new characters; and though troops with different merchandizes might meet at the same serai, they had no intercourse in public or private, and amongst the whole tribe at the fair, the same rule was maintained. Having disposed of their goods, they returned to their villages, where an equal division of the profit was made, and sacrifice offered for their successful enterprises.

CHAPTER V.

You may as well go stand upon the beach
And bid the main flood bate his usual height;
You may as well use question with the wolf,
Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb;
You may as well forbid the mountain pines
To wag their high tops, and to make a noise
When they are fretted with the gusts of heaven;
You may as well do any thing most hard,
As seek to soften that, (than which what 's harder?)
His Jewish heart.

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

As soon as the sun sunk behind the horizon, O Meer Sing quitted the retreat in which he had slept through the intense heat of the day, and took the way to the nearest serai, or caravansera, as they are called in Europe. When he arrived he found that there were several travellers there before him; but as they seemed all going in the direction he had come, he had little danger to apprehend from them. The serai was a large quadrangular building, en-

lcosing an open court, where the cattle or bulky merchandise could be placed. An open verandah ran round the square, out of which opened all the apartments; they were utterly unprovided with furniture, or accommodation of any kind, save what the shelter of a roof afforded against the weather, or the walls against wild animals, or nocturnal marauders. O Meer Sing knowing that his horse, as being different from the common country horses, was likely to attract notice, led him directly into the apartment he chose for himself, and seating himself quietly by him in the dark, could see by the light of the fires, which were kindled by the other travellers for preparing their evening meal, all that was going forward. Presently a horse dealer entered, leading a long string of Persian horses, and much to O Meer Sing's satisfaction, he ordered his servants to put them up close to the spot which he had chosen for himself and Ally Buxus. The sices commenced rubbing down their horses, and O Meer Sing taking off his jacket and turban, that he might appear like one of them, did the same

for his, and contrived by the help of a little bribery, to procure some of the food and bedding the strangers had brought along with them. From a hindoo flour merchant he purchased a supply of that useful article, and having provided for the comfort of his horse, he proceeded to bake some large thick cakes of his flour, and fixed them on the Hindoo's choolah.* When engaged in this way, another party arrived, consisting of twenty travellers, well loaded with bales of merchandise, and followed by two common bullock carriages, such as are used for the transport of women and children. Whenever any stranger entered, O Meer Sing kept himself quietly in the shadow, being unwilling to attract notice to himself or his steed. The newly arrived merchants took possession of some empty apartments in his neighbourhood, into which they carried their goods, and drawing up the rhuts close to the door, two women alighted, and went into that which was next to him, but they were so com-

* Chimney.

pletely veiled, that he could not distinguish their features or form. The merchants having deposited their family and goods, proceeded as usual to look after their bullocks and cooking. Two little boys, one of seven and the other of eight years old, came out of the family apartment, (which had a canvas purdah down over the door, signal sufficient that no stranger was to enter,) and with the curiosity natural to their age, went round the place, examining horses, baggage, and travellers, and of the latter asking an infinity of questions, such as where they came from? where they were going? what was their business? and how many travelled in their company?

O Meer Sing from his dark corner, was an attentive observer of all this, and he formed his own conclusions upon the subject; finding that the sices in his neighbourhood were on the opposite side busy with their meal, and out of hearing, he drew himself a little more forward in the light, so that the boys came up to talk with him in turn. "You are tired," said the urchin, "and I dare say, have travelled far."

From the borders of Persia," said O Meer Sing, repeating what he had heard one of the sices say to the same demand. "And you, my child, are come from Agra: did you see any travellers upon the road coming this way?"

"I saw many men, and perhaps coming this way," returned the boy with infantile simplicity; "but why do you ask?"

"I expect a friend to-morrow, and I wished to know if you had seen or heard of him."

"Show me how he travelled, and what was his train, and I shall try to remember."

"He is with a Mussulman, who is always well dressed, with many gold ornaments, because he is very rich, and rides upon an easy ambling white horse, with crimson velvet saddle, and silver stirrups; and two or three of his own servants on horseback after him; my friend is one. He comes with his master, who I hope has money to buy some of our horses."

"It is not likely he will have money on a journey, when he expects your master at Agra."

"True," said O Meer Sing, delighted with the sharpness of the boy, which saved his telling

more than was asked, "but he knows my master cannot wait until he returns, and he is going with a great offering to Secundra."

"Well, well," said the boy, "you may find him on the road."

"I shall be very glad, for if he is not here by the first meal to morrow, we shall leave the straight road, to go and see a Rajah who wants horses, and then go by another road to Agra; if you meet him on the road, say, that his friend of the summer apartments sends his salaam."

The boy promised obedience, and they continued to converse until each thought he had convinced the other, that the questions asked, and the information given, were merely casual. The child asked a thousand particulars about the horses, their qualities, and their prices, which the other was at no loss to answer, as if he had been acquainted with every one of them. It was now getting late, and all prepared for the repose they stood so much in need of, after the day's labour. The boys went back to the room from which they came, and as soon as they had done so, O Meer Sing crept quietly

into his. It was in perfect darkness, but a chink in the partition wall, showed him that his neighbour's had light. He glided close to the aperture, and saw what he had more than surmised; his disconsolate petitioner of the morning, seated very much at her ease, greedily listening to the detail of his own conversation with the little boy; of him the child spoke as the sice. Neither of them seemed to have the least suspicion that he was other than he seemed to be, and Rizia, not a little pleased with her own sagacity, in being disposed to credit the man she had talked with in the morning. Soon after, several of the gang crept into the place, and the whole conversation was repeated over again to them. Their intention was to hear what information the boys had collected; the flour merchant was not an object worth their notice, and he would probably join company with the horse dealers, as he had several good bullocks to carry his merchandise; and the sices were likely to make it lighter in a profitable way for him as he went along. The horses were not to be thought of; they were too numerous,

and too well attended, to disappear off the public road without leading to certain discovery, even had their party been strong enough for such an undertaking ; therefore it was dismissed as impracticable ; and being obliged to resign it, they fastened more greedily on the bait O Meer Sing had thrown out to them.

“ This Agra man is within our power,” said the leader. “ It seems his nisib is to fall into our hands, and to let him pass would be losing the fortune that the goddess Callia has sent us ; and who knows, if she would not be angry and punish us. The two warnings is a favourable omen ; and they come upon this, which has always been a lucky day.”

These wretches, though commonly Mussulmans, practise the superstitious rites of the low caste Hindoos, and always offer sacrifice to entreat success, before setting out on their horrid undertakings. It was resolved to send on the females and baggage under the care of fourteen of the troop, while the two boys, who might be useful on the present service, remained with the

others. "Our brothers must come before this man can reach Secundra," continued the leader; "or at all events before he can get back; and we shall certainly follow you with the horses. Keep if you can, the road I tell you, but if you are obliged to quit it, take care to make private marks; and above all, let nothing tempt you to do any more work until we have made market of our present rich booty; even if an unarmed man should present himself before you, covered with gold, do not look upon him, turn your eyes away. We are too heavy already, and nothing but the hope to get the horses, would make me attempt this. A wise man will never seize more than he can carry;" and then, addressing the boy who had talked with O Meer Sing, "You, Jumman, have done well, and wisely; and for your reward, shall have your hand in this work, when he is down." The child smiled with fiendish malice, trained as he had been in this school of demons, since his third year; when he had been stolen from a native village by one of the gang, who, wishing to make some little pur-

chases, inquired his way of the child; and was so satisfied with the distinctness and good sense of the little creature's answers, that, thinking he would be a useful emissary to his fraternity, he carried him off. Day by day his infant mind had been tutored in the ways of lies and dissembling; and he had been made, step by step as his master saw he could bear it, acquainted with cruelty and blood in its most revolting forms. At first he was initiated to practise upon animals; then, familiarized with the sight of the mutilated victims whom he had now a demoniac satisfaction in mangling, he anticipated the time when strength would give him power to slay with his own hand.

“We are amongst men,” said his guardian, in the instructions which he often gave him and the rest in his circumstances, “what tigers are amongst animals. They are permitted to live by blood, so are we; and they must teach their young to rend and to tear the prey that is taken, that they may be enabled to catch it for themselves; we also must do the same, and it is a

man's nisib, whether he falls by the teeth of a tiger, or the hands of a Phansygar."*

O Meer Sing, like Milton's Satan, when he had devised this work of revenge, returned satisfied that he had given his false friend into hands that would not easily quit their hold. "Aye," he thought with himself, as he stretched himself out by the side of his horse, "it is no matter if the greedy and treacherous fox die by strangling. The death of a dog is good enough for him, who meant to feed like a dog on the remains of his friend."

He laid himself down to sleep with perfect security; as he knew from the conversation he had overheard, that he had nothing to fear from his neighbours. It would not do to be seen by them in day light, and at present to take Ally Buxus out from the midst of them without observation was quite impracticable; his colour would betray him, and confirm them in the first idea, that the whole was an artifice used to lure

* This argument was really stated by one of the tribe, taken and executed in the Madras Presidency.

them into a net spread by the police. But O Meer conjectured, and the event showed rightly, that they had work to do which would require them to be stirring before day; he therefore with his usual self command, slept until the quiet movements of the Phansygars awaked him an hour before dawn. They left the Serai in the same way in which they had entered it, and altogether took the onward way to Secundra, as O Meer Sing thought, to give the horsedealer and his attendants time to get out of their way. He, from the entrance to the Serai, watched and carefully noted all their movements. It would not be prudent for him and his black horse to be seen by the sices, who might possibly be questioned on reaching Agra, about the travellers they had seen on the road; and he knew his good steed, if once seen, could never be overlooked by grooms and horsedealers. Therefore as soon as the Phansygars were out of sight, he softly led out Ally Buxus, taking the flour cakes which he had baked the night before, and the flour he had purchased, at his saddle bow. He dared not go back on the Agra road, and if he

went forward he would certainly soon overtake the Phansygars, to avoid which, (though it was a plan full of danger,) he resolved to make a detour to the right, and strike into the road after he had passed them. At that hour in the morning he dreaded to meet wild animals returning to their lairs, more for his horse than for himself; but he escaped as he had often before done, and as usual sought out a quiet place in which to pass the day.

After the shades of night had descended to conceal him from the eyes of those who resorted to Secundra, he repaired to that celebrated spot, and having tied up Ally Buxus in a private shed, which had been always used by him when he visited the fakir, whose name he had heard mentioned by Bently to Ali Cawn, he proceeded to present himself before the shrine of the reverend father, whom he found seated with his legs across, and his arms folded over his breast in deep meditation. His lamps placed in rows burnt around him. Many of his brethren, each at a little distance from the other, were placed in the same way, all abstracted from the

troubles of life, and having no care but to keep their lights burning, in honour of "the glorious memory of the renowned Akbar, the vice-gerent of the Prophet, the sun of monarchs, and the ruler of kings." Within the sumptuous mausoleum (whose tall minarets reared themselves above the place, like the sentries of time watching the flight of ages), reposed the ashes of him who had for fifty-one years reigned over the richest empire in the world; whose nod was fate; whose word was law; whose anger was death; and "whose glory," as historians expressed it, "would live as an example of renown to the kings of the world;" and if any should inquire, what is fame, and what is honour, and what is the renown which fills the world, let them go and see it all compressed into the fakir's lamps at Secundra!

O Meer Sing waited respectfully until Seid Hassan had raised his eyes, and condescended to look upon what was before him; but it was with an expression which convinced the practised individual subjected to his scrutiny, that his presence was unwelcome.

"I come, reverend father," he said, greeting the sage with a low salaam, "to lay gold on the altar that feeds the flame of your lamps."

The word has a penetrating magic in its sounds, which mines its way into all ears. Seid Hassan bent his head.

"And my face is become dry for sorrow, therefore seek I counsel of your wisdom."

"To counsel the erring, to comfort the afflicted, over whom the bitter waters of desolation have flowed, is my business, next to honouring the prophet, and the lights of our faith. Child of the dust, follow me."

He rose, and crossing a great court, which surrounded the mosque, led the way into a private cell, set apart for the reception of those who might come to benefit by his wisdom or his prayers. A single lamp burned in the place, which showed a small door at the further end. Seid Hassan entered first. O Meer Sing followed. The fakir set himself down in silence, his guest did so likewise, and seeing that he was expected to speak first, began: "It has been revealed to me, that the tongue of malice

has turned the face of Seid Hassan from his friend."

"O Meer Sing has despised the counsel of the wise," said the sage, gazing upon his light, without moving a feature of his face, while the words seemed to issue from his mouth as from an oracle; "and has meddled with those who are too strong for him, and has forgotten to feed the lamp of friendship at Secundra, which when neglected must burn out."

"No," answered the accused, "he has not forgotten it. It is to pour oil into the lamp that he now comes, and its fountain shall be of gold before a month passes, if its light never shines upon those who wish to dry the only streams that can fill it."

"The roaring streams which come from the mountains, though they may roll down some grains of gold in their course; running off, leave a desert behind them, which nothing can make fertile."

"No," said O Meer Sing, drawing himself up, "the stagnate waters of the plain shine on the eye, but do not satisfy the thirst of man.

The lordly Ganges, when he comes down in his power, may do mischief to the timid and the negligent; but he scatters riches and plenty where he runs, for those who know how to improve by the benefits he bestows.

“When the harvest appears, we shall credit the tongue that foretold it.”

“Seid Hassan was not so unbelieving, when he took part of the spoil of the diamond merchants of Golconda, to light his altars,” retorted O Meer Sing, bitterly.

“How could the spoil of the unbelieving dogs be so properly used as to light the tomb of their master? Has he not a right to share in all that belongs to his subjects?”

“And he shall share, I have already told you; take this for earnest,” and he drew a heavy bag from his girdle; “your council has been useful to me on former occasions. Tell me, good father, that you will never make known the path through the jungle to the encampment, and your sanctity shall have wherewith to make it shine in the eyes of all men.”

“The sanctity of Seid Hassan shines in the

light of the Prophet's countenance ! but if he is disposed to fill with oil the lamps which burn to his honour, far be it from his humblest servant to leave them cold."

" Murder ! robbery ! thieves ! help ! O my master ! my master !" shouted a voice in the court, which at every word sounded nearer and nearer.

At first the two occupants of the cell were, with the natural indifference of natives, disposed to go on with the affair they had in hand, leaving those without to look to their own business ; but the next exclamation which reached their ears, had an electric effect on both, and at the same instant they stood on their feet, confronting each other.

" It is Seid Hassan to whom the servant of Ali Cawn would go, in the ashes which have fallen upon his head ; " said a voice without the door. " My master was coming to him with a great offering, but he is robbed and murdered, and there is none left but me."

" Is this what has been revealed to O Meer Sing ? " demanded the fakir, for the first time

looking full in his eyes, while his own sparkled with every cruel passion.

O Meer Sing returned the glance, and for a minute they stood opposite to each other, their black eyes dilated with the venom of two snakes, who seemed just ready to throw themselves upon each other in mortal combat: "Was it by robbing a devout Mussulman on his pilgrimage, that O Meer Sing thought to make the lamps burn at Secundra?"

"It is a lie," answered the accused, whose passions, when they were roused, overpowered every sense of danger; "a base unfounded lie! There are others who come to this cell, more likely to do such little work; the lion does not stoop to dogs!"

The fakir threw upon him a glance which it would be difficult to define; the veins strongly marked in his forehead swelled like whip-cord; but he moved not his body, and answered not a word. O Meer marked the swelling venom of the coiled snake, and laughed in scorn.

"Rest here," said Seid Hassan, calmly, tak-

ing no notice of the insult, “ if life is sweet to you, while I go out.”

The clamour in the court had increased to a great degree, though no one had ventured to disturb the privacy of the reverend father, hearing from the other fakirs that he was engaged in the duties of consolation. When he quitted the cell, he drew a bolt on the outside which fastened O Meer Sing in the narrow apartment, without the power of leaving it until his gaoler thought proper. It might be to secure him from the intrusion of others ; at all events O Meer Sing, according to his custom, thought it wise to reconnoitre the place, and taking up the chirague * for that purpose, he discovered a bit of white paper on the spot where the fakir had been seated. Upon examination it proved to be a Hindostanee note from Agra, offering a good sum as a reward to any person whom he would get to conduct the Company’s troops to O Meer Sing’s strong-hold in the jungle.

“ The villain ! the double-faced dissembling

* Little earthen lamp.

villain ! there is but one way to bind him. If I had followed Byram's advice, the last time he was there, he would not have been here now to chaffer like a pedlar for my life, or my troop—but it is not too late for him who cannot fix a friend, to silence an enemy."

He examined the small door at the further end of the cell, and found that it was also fastened on the outside like that by which he entered ; having vainly tried with his dagger to effect an opening in the solid door, by which he might force back the bolt, he retreated to the farther end of the little place, and making a running leap, struck his foot with all his strength against the stubborn door, which, notwithstanding his greatest exertions, refused to move. He felt now indeed, that the toil was well set ; and furious at the thought, tried a last effort, though it was only in desperation that he would have used means attended by so much noise. He drew forth one of his pistols, and placing it exactly opposite to the bar, fired through it, thus forming a channel which he instantly crammed with powder from his horn, and re-loading his

pistol, twisted up the paper into a match, which he fastened to the hole he had just bored, held up the lamp to light the projecting end, and retired into a corner. In an instant it exploded, shivering the massy bar to splinters, and the door swung open on its hinges; he had not a moment to lose, and with his pistol in his hand, he passed into another cell, which had two doors, one on each side, and secured inwardly. He drew the bolts of both, and found that on the left side opened without the court, while the other on the right led into it. He crept out under the covert of a shadow, and saw Seid Hassan, standing before his shrine, and giving orders, as he was certain from his movements, to several men who stood round him, armed with spears and matchlocks, to seize him in the cell.

O Meer saw, with a sensation of exultation, that notwithstanding the number of his enemies, they all hung back, and were shy at presenting themselves before a single individual. "He is an enemy of the Company and of the Prophet," said Seid Hassan, "his hands are wet with the

blood of a true believer, and he is heavy with the spoils he has taken. The Company Sahib has offered a great reward to any who will bring him alive or dead. He came to me with his mouth filled with lies; but our glorious Prophet (who never suffers the blood of his followers to sink into the ground) discovered to the most unworthy of his servants, the deed of this unbelieving miscreant, written in blood upon his forehead."

The fakir's miracle was suited to the minds of his hearers, and a murmur of indignation rose amongst them: "Aye," continued the orator, "and the Company knew that the good Mussulmans who frequent Secundra, hate the evil ways of this man, and all his tribe; and would work hard to earn the reward."

O Meer ground his teeth in the shadow where he stood, like a wolf watching the prey upon which he was prepared to spring; the men excited by the fakir's promises, moved towards the cell. O Meer made a dart, fired his pistol, and Seid Hassan fell on his shrine. The report of the first pistol had been deafened by the

thickness within which it was fired, but this rung through the lofty mosque with echoes, as if a general discharge instead of a single shot had been fired.

“The robbers are here! the murderers are come!” shouted fifty voices at the same moment; but he who had done the deed, staid not until the first panic had subsided, and search should be made for its author. Satisfied with the revenge he had taken, he crossed through the cell from which he had last emerged, and finding himself without the court, made all possible haste to the shed where he had left his fleet Ally Buxus, and putting him to his utmost speed, he held forward at a rate which few horses in India could equal. All the country behind him was up in arms, and he had reason to know from what passed between Captain Bently and Ali Cawn, that the former with his party could not be at any great distance from him. His determination was to push on for his own encampment, in the hope that he might find a sufficient number of his troop to fight their ground, if they were attacked before he

could effect an orderly retreat. So many of his people had been with him in Oude, and he had travelled at such a rate since he had left Lucknow, that he feared none of those had time to meet in the general rendezvous, which had been for several years their undisturbed quarters during the rains, which were now upon the point of setting in. Could he by any means delay the coming of Captain Bently's party for ten days, he was certain that he would have a force sufficient to bid open defiance, if it was necessary, to that sent against him. If, in his present circumstances, he were forced to fly further to the northward, he should lose every hope of collecting his troop before the end of the rains; or perhaps would subject them to be cut off in small parties; or, still more humiliating, force them, for want of protection, to engage themselves with other leaders of his own profession.

While engaged in these reflections, he turned suddenly upon a small band of travellers, amongst whom with three others, he at a glance recognised the white horse of Ali Cawn. The travellers journeyed as fast as their beasts could

carry them, and at the sound of approaching hoofs, crowded as much together as possible, as if to conceal the white horse in the midst of them; but the eyes which now looked upon them with the satisfaction of gratified revenge, were not to be deceived.

“They have made sure work,” he thought, “and were it not for the babbling cowardly fool, they have suffered to escape to Secundra, the Company’s troops might yet be made to wait for the intelligence he will never carry to them. But still, had it not been for his howling, I might have been caught in the trap of the other hypocrite. Now neither the one nor the other can tell tales, nor carry them; and all men shall know, that those who engage with a Pindaree chief, make the engagement for life or for death.”

O Meer earnestly wished for the presence of his lieutenant, but he had left him behind in Oude; and though he was also well mounted, his horse could not compare with Ally Buxus; and it was not to be expected that if even the

roads were open, he could make his appearance yet for a few days.

“ My faithful comrade,” he said, addressing his steed, “ you are now my only friend ; many others have deceived me, and plotted my ruin ; but you have been always true, you have carried me safe through every danger, you have been my companion by day and by night ; we have eaten the same bread, and drunk the same water, and slept side by side. My brother ! the son of my mother ! you are next to my right hand, my best hope.” The horse, sensible to the tones of his master’s voice, moved his ears, as if pleased with the accent of kindness, without slackening his rapid course.

Had O Meer Sing been born to rule, he would have left the reputation of a just and warlike prince behind him ; had he commanded an army, he possessed those qualities which would have insured him the character of a brave and able general. As it was, his talents, like edge tools misapplied, had been employed not to build but to destroy ; and the evil propensities of the natural man, unchecked by moral

or religious education, had borne fearful fruit. O Meer Sing's ambition led him to prefer heading a banditti, to serving under a king; and, as his troops amounted to thousands, he thought his ravages as much entitled to fame as if hereditary rule had authorised them. He was endowed with the powers of mind and body which commanded popular applause when not exerted against the peace and order of society; and it was no wonder, if in a country like the northern provinces of India, subdivided amongst petty princes, and torn asunder by domestic broils, and the jarring competition of separate interests, he should have viewed his own profession and character in a very different light to that in which they it must have appeared to all but his own followers.

CHAPTER VI.

As when a prowling wolf,
Whom hunger drives to seek new haunts for prey,
Watching where shepherds pen their flocks at eve
In hurdled cotes, amid the field secure,
Leaps o'er the fence with ease into the fold :

* * * * *

They sat devising death
To them who lived.

PARADISE LOST.

To return to Ali Cawn. He rose the next morning after the departure of O Meer Sing at an earlier hour than usual ; and his first care was to put the gold mohrs of O Meer in a place of security. Before day-break, his attendants were in readiness, and his horses saddled, for the secret mission he had undertaken. He knew one of the fakirs belonging to the splendid mosque erected as a mausoleum to the memory of the emperor Akbar at Secundra, intimately well ; but as their intimacy was a source of emolument to both, it was always guarded as a

profound secret. Ali Cawn and this fakir had too many friends of different descriptions, ever to commit themselves by mentioning the name of one to another, so that their mutual acquaintance with O Meer Sing and his troop was unknown to both; and when Bently mentioned him as the person to whom Ali Cawn was to go, for the precise direction he wanted, he heard the reverend Seid Hassan spoken of as a person to whom he was a total stranger. To hear without speaking is as much a principle of Mussulman wisdom, as it is of Mussulman politeness. But though he spoke not, from this circumstance he gathered that O Meer Sing's race was nearly run, since Seid Hassan, like himself, was disposed to play the faithful servant, and he knew that the vultures begin to collect when they scent their prey; so he now entered willingly and boldly into any thing which was to be done, securely imagining that his share in it would remain locked up by his own discretion.

Seid Hassan, to whom he was going, was perhaps one of the most accomplished rogues who

ever made a pilgrimage to Mecca. Naturally bold, crafty, and ambitious, nothing but the indolence, which formed an equally conspicuous feature in his character, prevented his commencing his career in life as a soldier of fortune. To indulge his love of ease, and at the same time enjoy the distinction which he coveted, he took upon himself the gown and beads of a fakir, under which he had at different times in his life given full scope to his various talents. In times of war, he had exercised his crafty and enterprising spirit as a spy, serving by turns amongst all the independent native princes, and by such means amassing enough to live in luxury at Secundra. His pilgrimage to the tomb of the prophet had procured him a reputation of sanctity, which caused his absence, however long, or however frequent, to be placed to the account of his known zeal for the saints, and his love of solitude and abstinence. Persons came from distant provinces to enjoy the benefit of his prayers, and always left tokens of their gratitude behind them, and amongst the number who came, it was not surprising if the

good father made acquaintance and conveyed intelligence amongst many of those whose names could not be spoken in the mosque, and whose existence was rather dreaded than known. He had at different times (when he had any end of private revenge to answer, or any wish to remove out of his way those who crossed his path, given information to the Company's officers, which led to the apprehension of evil doers, of whom it was natural such a good man should wish to rid the country.

To him, therefore, Bently had been advised to apply, as to a person well qualified to procure a guide to O Meer Sing's haunt; and Ali Cawn was charged with a sum of money, which was to be deposited in the mosque, to reward this secret service. The cutwab, proud of the trust reposed in him, and revolving his own schemes to make it turn to his profit, set forth in full security, attended as beseemed a person of his consequence, by four of his own servants, mounted upon common country horses; while he ambled before them, upon the steed already described by O Meer Sing. As that expe-

rienced calculator had conjectured, Ali Cawn arrived at the serai where he had passed the night, to take his first meal in the morning, and there he determined to repose while the sun was above the horizon, and again move forward when it had set. He felt himself to be a Company's servant, and in all the dignity of office rode into the centre court, and while his sice held his stirrup, dismounted and gazed about him. A string of camel drivers occupied one side, and in observations upon them, he did not deign to notice two meanly dressed men, who, however, had not overlooked him. One glance satisfied them, and with the humility becoming their station, they withdrew behind the merchandise, with which the place was filled. The hot winds raged in all their fury, obliging men and beasts to seek shelter from their scorching influence; and when the sices and drivers had watered their cattle from the large and deep well which the munificence of the house of Timor had caused to be dug for the accommodation of travellers, every one retired as much as he could from the fiery blast; men and

animals laid themselves down to slumber, and every thing sunk into profound silence, except the rushing wind. In this way, they dozed out the long hot day. Hour after hour passed, and at length brought the lengthening shadows; when the place became again a scene of noise and bustle. Restive camels threw their loads as soon as they were placed upon their backs, and their fretted driversa mped and swore at the spiteful brutes; who grinned as wickedly, as if they had a mischievous satisfaction in the trouble they gave. The two poor travellers, having neither luggage to carry, nor animals to caparison, were gone long before Ali Cawn and his retinue had quitted the place.

They journeyed forward at a regular travelling trot, until they drew near Secundra; and the cutwab began to rejoice in the favourable termination of the journey they had made without accident or hindrance. While he was giving orders to his servants for their lodging at night, he observed several travellers upon the road before them, with a bullock covered carriage. As he drew near, the bullocks, with the perverse-

ness sometimes found in them, took their necks out of the yoke, and threw the carriage right across the road, where they turned themselves outwards, so as almost to block up the path just as Ali Cawn and his troop advanced. The travellers crowded into the middle of the way, some to right the overturned vehicle, and others to disentangle the wayward bullocks. Ali Cawn's servants separated to pass on each side ; at the moment one of the men engaged with the bullocks, cracked a long whip, and the horses started, some back, the others forward, while his practised companions, who stood ready prepared to take advantage of the manoeuvre, and the separation it must occasion, singled each one his prey, and dexterously threw the fatal noose over their necks. Ali Cawn opened his mouth to call for help, but the sound, ere it parted from his lips, was choked in his throat. The phansygar strained upon the end of the slip knot which he held in his hand, and easily pulled his powerless victim from his seat ; while one of his comrades buried his dagger in his bosom, and a third caught his horse.

The boy Jumman, like a tiger cub, sprung forward to bathe in the blood with ferocious delight. "Your friend of the summer apartments sends you a salaam," he shouted in the ears of the dying man, whom the others were stripping; "and thus I give it," striking his dagger with all the force of which his weak arm was capable.

Ali Cawn opened his eyes at the sound, and then closed them for ever.

The young fiend, whose malice found vent in embittering the last moments of the wretched sufferers, by what he supposed the recollection of friendship, went round repeating the same words, and acting the same abominations on all the slain, as he did not know the precise individual to whom the message was addressed. Three of Ali Cawn's servants had fallen with their master. The horse of the fourth individual, becoming restive at the cracking of the whip, took fright and ran away, by which means he saved the life of his terrified rider. Some of the wretches, as soon as they had got possession of the other horses, mounted and followed, but could not come up with him before

he reached Secundra, and then knowing that the police would be in instant pursuit, they held on, making their private signals on the road, and leaving the rest of their party to finish their bloody work. Had they succeeded, as they rarely failed to do, without any escaping from their hands, they would have buried their victims, and encamped upon the spots; setting up their closed tents, as if inhabited by the females of their families, which would of course prevent the entrance of strangers. Now one had escaped, who would undoubtedly send the police out in quest of them. They therefore stripped the bodies, and leaving them a prey to the jackalls, loaded their bullocks with the spoil, abandoned the rhut which would only impede their progress, and leaving the high road, sought, by ways known to themselves, to come up with the rest of their gang; which they effected as soon as they were obliged to stop to rest their weary horses. Having fed and watered them, this troop of demons in human form proceeded together, and it was then that O Meer Sing had for the second time passed them. They

were at the time making as merry over the agonies they had caused, and the horrors they had inflicted, as a bull-baiter, a cock-fighter, a boxer, or any other practised professor of cruelty could have done over a day's sport. No man among them is allowed to strike the first blow on a victim until he has attained the age of eighteen, and not then unless he should have considerable personal strength. To throw the noose, is never permitted under three and twenty, and as much practice is required to attain the unerring certainty with which it is cast over the neck of unwary travellers, as an European duellist expends in firing at a bull's eye or snuffing candles with his pistols.

Seid Hassan imagined, when his conversation with the Pindaree chief was interrupted by the outcry of Ali Cawn's terrified servant, that he saw the author of the outrage before him, and exasperated that a true believer, who was coming with an offering to the mosque, should have been murdered and robbed just at the very gate, he for once forgot the caution in which it was his habit to wrap himself, and permitted his suspicions to betray themselves to O Meer Sing.

The moment that each stood confronting the other, their looks served to convince both that the fire of unextinguishable hatred burned with equal fury in both bosoms, and that each would equally seek to quench it in the blood of the other; but O Meer Sing fancied, that proud and revengeful and wrathful as he knew the fakir to be, his covetousness would master all other passions, until his own large promises were fulfilled; therefore he permitted him to go alone while he remained in the cell. When he actually found himself caught, like the chafed lion he was ready to spring upon the hunters, revenge took possession of his mind, and the single wish to make it more certain, alone restrained him one moment from flying on his enemy, in the face of those whom the murder and robbery had brought together. When this fearful passion, which strongly assimilates the mind of fallen man to the author of every evil, had obtained its gratification, he experienced a moment of dreadful satisfaction. Seid Hassan he believed was alone acquainted with the route which led to the jungle encampment, and he trusted

the secret had died in his bosom. As he rode on, without once slackening his pace, he kept a wary eye around him, as far as the shadow of night permitted, for fear of falling in with the scouts belonging to Captain Bently's party, which he judged (from the place he had heard named, between that officer and Ali Cawn as the spot where the detachment should await the precise instructions which the fakir was to send) could not now be at a very great distance. For his safety it was indispensable that he should get in advance of his pursuers, before the events of the last eventful night should be blazed abroad. It seemed as if every step he had taken since his visit to Lucknow had increased the number of his enemies, and been the means of joining many who had very different interests in one common cause against him; but he still consoled himself with the reflexion that his nisib was on his forehead, and he should soon be in a country in the possession of numerous independant petty princes; amongst whom, if all other refuge failed him, he would certainly find safe hiding.

Captain Bently and his company left Agra as

soon as it was possible for them to procure the requisite carriage cattle for what was likely to be a long service ; after a fatiguing march they reached the appointed place where the guide to the jungle rendezvous was appointed to meet them, and, after waiting a whole day in anxious expectation, a messenger arrived with the tidings of the murderous events which had frustrated the plan. Both murders were laid to the account of O Meer Sing and his gang, and so zealous were the fakirs to revenge the martyrdom of their reverend brother on his own shrine, that they affixed written placards to their gates, offering a reward to any one who would undertake to guide the Company's troops to the haunt of the decoits. They were not without hopes that, amongst the number who from all parts of the country resorted to the tomb, some one might be found qualified for such an undertaking.

This intelligence was a severe disappointment to Bently, who almost blamed himself for having exposed the Cutwab to the vengeance of such an enemy. The subadar remarked, " Behold the reward of him who fixed his mind upon this per-

fidious world, and who has played one part with his right hand and another with his left."

"What do you mean?" demanded Bently.

"That Ali Cawn practised the worship of the wind (flattery) with his masters, and had more knowledge of this man and his ways than any good man ought to have."

"If that was the case he has met with his reward, and Seid Hassan has suffered in his cause."

"He also has showed his face where he would not have wished his name to be spoken. He was a Mussulman and I am a Hindoo; but he knew more than he could ever have learnt at the tombs of his saints, and perhaps got more rupees than were required for his lamps."

"But why did you not tell me this before I depended upon the services of such rogues?"

"Because it is not the first time that rogues have served the Company, and if death had not stopped them they would have done as well as better men."

"You are right, but this unfortunate delay gives O Meer Sing opportunity to

get far before us, and to refresh that horse, for what is yet to do. It would be useless for us to wait here, for after what has happened he dare not remain in this neighbourhood, therefore we shall march forward on the Delhi road, and take every means to discover his haunt."

"Some of our sepoys are natives of this part of the country, and they say, that it has always been reported, that a band of decoits live in the great wilderness, within eighty miles of Delhi."

Bently's party was encamped in an arid desert, burnt up by excessive heat; the sun's rays struck through his tent like fire, and to screen his head from their insupportable effect he was obliged to pass the day literally under the table, having nothing else with which he could defend himself; here he remained, under the shadow which it cast on the ground, as the sand beyond it soon became too hot for the touch. No living thing could have been exposed in the fiery tempest and retained life; birds, as if shot, fell from the trees, and animals sought caverns and impervious thickets in which to pass the dreadful hours. Respiration was impeded by the sand

which loaded the air, and sifted through every crevice in burning showers. At sun-set the wind still blew, and when the moon rose, it could only be discerned like a plate of copper shining through a loaded atmosphere. It was not until midnight that the tents could be struck, when the wind having abated, and the air being less oppressive, the party moved on.

When they turned into a part of the road which commanded a view of the hills, a most magnificent scene presented itself; these mountains were covered with hill bamboos, which had from the fury of the wind and violence of friction caught fire: now the flame ran along in horizontal lines; then it shot up perpendicularly to the top of the mountains, or ran round them in all directions, just as it met with obstruction or food for its fury. The crackling branches threw up showers of sparks, flaming like a discharge of sky rockets, and wherever they fell spreading the fire. Sometimes the howl of wild animals, surrounded by its rapid progress, rose above the roar of the flames, causing the cattle which carried the tents to tremble in every joint.

Conflagrations of this kind are common in the mountainous and rocky parts of Hindostan ; the trees they bear, though they have but little root, run up to a great height, and become from their situation dry as touchwood in the hot winds ; the bamboo, during one rainy season, which usually lasts four months, is known to run up sixty feet from the root ; the continued friction consequent upon these long stems, lashed about by the fury of the wind, soon sets the mountains in a blaze ; their ashes then manure the soil, and prepare the roots to bud again as soon as the rains descend.

Day after day Captain Bently continued his toilsome march, or, more properly, night after night, for it was seldom until the moon rose that he could attempt to move, and always after sunrise he was obliged to take his ground for the day. He was extremely anxious to discover the encampment of O Meer Sing, if possible, before the rains (which were now just at hand) should set in, and render the traversing the jungle very dangerous for his men, subject as all natives are to fever. They, with the patient philosophy

which springs from their quiet belief in irresistible necessity, bore all without murmur or complaint. "It has always been so in Hindostan. What can any one do? It will always be so. Why should any one complain?"

The subadar of Captain Bently's company had been like all native officers promoted from the ranks step by step, as the reward of his good conduct, until he had arrived at his present dignity, when his rank entitled him to command, and his pay enabled him to keep a tattoo * for his own riding, and a servant to attend upon him. He had for many years served in the company which Captain Bently commanded, and a friendly relation had always subsisted between them. Bently respected the sound sense and undeviating good conduct of his native officer, and the native esteemed the justice, probity, and impartiality of the European.

At length the scouts brought the wished-for intelligence, they had fallen in with a shekrar,† who in his excursions in the forest had disco-

* A country horse.

† Professional hunter.

vered the secret resort of those who had often filled the country with terror and alarm. To Captain Bently's inquiry "why he had not given this information to the police?" he answered, "that the gain would not be equal to the loss. They would perhaps give a few rupees for a reward, and my neighbours in the jungle, when they heard it, would have burnt my house about my ears, and every one in it. If my lord should not catch them in the place which his slave will show him, the money he has promised to his slave will enable him to take his family to another place; and the decoits, when they are at home, give so much trouble that game is not so plenty now as it once was."

Having finished all preliminaries with the guide, upon whose good faith they could depend, Bently ordered his men to encamp that night on the edge of the forest, that they might have daylight to enter it. With the first streak of dawn they commenced their arduous undertaking, leaving a naig * and four sepoy to guard the

* Corporal.

tents and baggage. Bently's sirdar-bearer volunteered, as he had often done, to attend his master. Dukee, of floating celebrity, also presented his petition to the same effect, and being both armed with tulwars in case of need, and provided with soories of water, and a small flask of brandy for their master, set forth with the rest of the party, the guide leading the way, without speaking a word, the commanding officer having enjoined the strictest silence.

They entered the almost impervious jungle by the dry bed of what became the course of a torrent in the rains, and proceeded over its loose bottom for several hundred yards. Turning short through the arches of an enormous banian tree, whose descending branches almost concealed the entrance, they discovered a narrow path, just wide enough to permit a horse to pass; and as they advanced they observed that in different places the low branches seemed to have been lopped for that purpose. Out of the path it was in most places impossible to venture; strong jungle thorn, and tangled climbers, rendered the place impenetrable to any thing having a softer

skin than a rhinoceros. They thus advanced, one after the other, in cautious and watchful silence. The morning, as is commonly the case, preceding the rains, was dark and still; not a breath disturbed the brown wilderness, which had for so many months resounded to the fury of the hot winds, and not a sound shook it but the long low murmur of distant thunder which ran round the hills. Almost stifled by the oppressive closeness and intense heat of the atmosphere, and the earth on which they trod, they moved forward with the utmost difficulty; sometimes their path bent round clumps of gigantic trees, whose interlaced arms threw an ominous gloom around them, and the men, aware that such situations are the chosen retreat of tigers, kept a strict look out, almost expecting to see them leap from the large caverns which time had hollowed for them in many an enormous trunk. The hindmost man of the file, in passing, faced about and moved backwards until he had gained a place of greater seeming security.

In this way they continued to move for four hours, and might have advanced five or six miles

into the depth of the forest, when their guide in a whisper, warned Captain Bently that they were within two hundred yards of the spot, and the very next turning showed them their path completely blocked up with furze and dry thorns. Here then they were obliged to halt and consider what was next to be done, as it was evident, from this obstruction, that the Pindarees expected an attack, and had taken their precautions according. Bently ordered his men to remain under the command of the subadar, while he with the hunter should reconnoitre the jungle, and endeavour to discover another means of approach, as it was impossible to attempt removing the brush-wood which choked their present path, without creating a general alarm. "Your white jacket, sahib, will be seen amongst the leaves," said the subadar, "and perhaps bring you into danger; if you will allow me to go with the shekrar, I shall strip, and so escape their sharp eyes."

The idea was approved, and Bently while he remained, employed his people in cutting down the creepers and clearing a little space where

they might stand off the path by which they came. All this was performed in perfect silence, and every one kept a watchful ear towards the encampment, that they might be in readiness to support the scouts if assistance was required. In the course of twenty minutes, which seemed as many hours to Bently's impatience, the subadar and the hunter returned, having discovered a practicable approach, and satisfied with that discovery, they had not ventured to go further, for fear of betraying themselves. The party proceeded as fast as the jungle thorns would permit, having many a winding to make before they could work themselves through such manifold obstacles. The guide stopped to give them all time to take breath ; and, pointing with his finger, they observed through the branches a considerable space, cleared of underwood, and a great many huts erected under the large trees ; from their appearance it was evident that some were unoccupied, but what the present force of their enemy was they could not ascertain, and knowing, from the smoke which curled through the boughs, that the inhabitants were employed in

cooking their morning meal, Captain Bently ordered the sepoy's to advance as close upon them as was possible without being perceived, and then make a simultaneous rush, without giving them time to form, reserving their fire until they were near enough to make almost every shot effectual. The decoits, surprised by such an unexpected onset, grasped their arms, which night or day were never out of their reach, and starting upon their feet, returned the fire of the sepoy's. After this first discharge, which had caused considerable loss on both sides, the combatants closed, and with their bayonets and tulwars fought hand to hand; their numbers were pretty nearly equal, and each having to struggle for individual preservation, left little time for observation of others. Bently sought in vain for O Meer Sing. The clash of arms resounded on the tough embossed shields of the decoits, on whom, accustomed as they were to this kind of warfare, the blows of their enemies made little impression. Captain Bently, unwilling that they should spend their strength in useless efforts, with the assistance of his subadar, called off his men as if in flight,

when rapidly retreating behind the large trunks, they loaded their muskets, and awaited the pursuit, which they knew would be instantly made.

When O Meer Sing, who, in his undress, had not been distinguished from his gang, had collected them from different spots in which each fought his own battle, he rushed furiously forward, followed by his own band. Their course was arrested by a volley from the sepoy, which brought four of the gang to the ground. O Meer Sing's left arm dropped powerless, and his shield fell from his nerveless grasp; but his presence of mind never forsook him. Instantly giving a private signal to his own party, they turned with one accord and in different directions fled into the jungle, where in one moment they were lost to sight.

The sepoy had no sooner re-loaded than Bently, to prevent a surprise, filed into the open space; after consulting for a moment with his subadar, he resolved to go in instant pursuit of the chief, who they conjectured to be so severely wounded, that it was impossible he could move with speed. But in this they were de-

ceived; O Meer Sing, though his arm was broken by the ball, wrapped his scarp round it to stop the blood, and crossing the end about his neck, supported it as in a sling, making every exertion to reach a place of safety before the faintness, which he knew must follow, should incapacitate him for farther movement. A word to his followers explained his plan, and they, as active in execution as he was in invention, fired shots in quite an opposite direction, to attract the notice of his pursuers, and give him time to reach his ready saddled steed. Grasping his mane with his right hand, he was instantly on his back, and with a private word in the ear of his lieutenant, Byram, he disappeared through a hut which had an opening on the other side, into a little winding path, partly natural and partly artificial, and which it had been the business of his followers, since his last return amongst them, to put into its present good condition. He was no sooner gone, than they drew forward a mat which shut the door by which he had passed, and piled against it heap of dry grass and forage which they

kept for their cattle, thus shutting out every trace of his track, and having done so, threw themselves into the forest, and continued to harass their pursuers with shots from every direction.

The thicket upon each side of the private path was so completely interwoven by jungle-thorn, that the sepoy, though strict in their search, failed to discover it, and returned after an hour's anxious labour, faint with heat and toil. The subadar then proposed that all the huts should undergo a minute inspection, and Bently warned the sepoy not to let their natural love of plunder make them overlook the probability of ambushes. In the huts they found an immense quantity of valuable booty, several of the cooking vessels were of silver, and many of the tulwars richly inlaid with precious stones. All was considered as the lawful property of the captors; and sepoy and servants were equally anxious to secure their share, and to load themselves with the massy gold ornaments they found in every hut.

“And here,” said Julall, coming earnestly

forward, and dragging a horse after him, "is a beast, sahib, to carry the dishes; I would be very sorry to leave them for thieves and Pindarees; it is a shameful word to tell, that such as them should eat off silver;" and he forthwith proceeded with the assistance of his mate, Dukee, to load the animal with all that he could lay hands on.

Finding that the encampment was completely evacuated, and that further search was only spending time to no purpose, Captain Bently prepared to depart; he did not judge it expedient to remain in the jungle during the night, being perfectly aware that the decoits had places of concealment which, without a guide, he could not reach; and his present conductor frankly confessed his ignorance. Bently also feared, if he kept possession of the huts, an attack might be made after night-fall, which, from the nature of the situation, he had no men to repel; the local knowledge of his enemies would, in such circumstances, render them more than a match for him; though from the size of the encampment, and the deserted state of

many of the huts, he conjectured that O Meer Sing had but a small number of his troop with him, when he surprised them; and he could not help suspecting that, though unseen, they were still at hand. Like a swarm of bees disturbed in their hive, they had risen and dispersed; but like them it was probable they would again collect, as soon as they could with impunity.

Having waited until the sepoy had constructed a funeral pile, upon which they laid the bodies of those of their comrades who had fallen in the first fire of the decoits, and bound up the hurts of the wounded as well as circumstances would permit, torches were set to the pile, which dry as tinder blazed in a moment, and the whole party left the spot while they had day-light to guide them, taking with them a wounded decoit who had been made prisoner when O Meer Sing escaped. Several shots were fired upon them from the jungle, as they passed, one of which went through the crown of Bently's hat, without, however, touching his head.

His subadar, who marked the spot from whence it came, snatched a musket from the hand of his next neighbour, and with more exact aim (for he caught sight of a man moving in the leaves), fired up into a thick tree, across the path, and brought the unsuccessful marksman in an instant to the ground. In this way they made good their retreat; whenever a shot came amongst them, the men instantly poured their muskets in the direction from which it was fired, and were sure to return it with interest, their commanding officer having positively forbidden any one to leave the path, for fear of falling into an ambush.

Fortunately the day had been extremely cloudy; the sun had not once looked out through the dense mass of vapour by which he was obscured; the thunder rolled nearer, and every flash of lightning became brighter; the birds mounted to the topmost boughs, the squirrels leaped from branch to branch; the peacocks, of which there were hundreds in the jungles, strutted into the path spreading their tails and crests, screaming in concert with the frogs, who opened their throats

in thousands; all seemed to hail with delight the indications of approaching rain; the thirsty wilderness waited in still expectation of the promised blessing; no leaf moved, save those disturbed by its living inmates; and Bently, with his weary companions, toiled through it as fast as their exhausted state would permit. It was now near sunset, and during the whole long day (for they began their march before four in the morning) no food had passed their lips. The water which they had each carried was long since expended, and the jungle did not furnish a drop to moisten their parched lips. However, they did not complain, and before dark they arrived at their own encampment without accident, and were hardly housed when the rain descended with the rush of a cataract; for three days and three nights the clouds continued to pour down their streams, and the brown jungle assumed a colour of the brightest green; the arid sands under the same revivifying influence, put on a verdant mantle, and the whole face of nature underwent a change.

In such weather it was impossible to move;

and during the three days that Captain Bently remained stationed on the same spot, the sepoy took the opportunity to convert their booty into money, in a neighbouring village, as being of more easy conveyance. During the time they were so employed, they obtained intelligence which determined Captain Bently in the plan he was to follow.

CHAPTER VII.

My waefu' heart lies low wi' his
Whose heart was only mine ;
Oh what a heart was that to lose !
But I maun no repine.

BURNS.

MAJOR Melville, to whom we shall now refer, had spent several weeks at the Residency, and though his health was certainly better, yet it was far from being perfectly re-established. The rains had set in, and the stream of the river would carry him down in opposition to the monsoon; he therefore determined, notwithstanding the Doctor's remonstrances, and Colonel Cheapstow's entreaties, to return without further delay by water to Benares; as nothing could now induce him to protract the anxiety Mrs. Melville had suffered on his account. He therefore wrote to inform her of his intention, and taking leave of the friends who had received

him so hospitably, he embarked on board his budgerow, which he found the kindness of Colonel Cheapstow had stored with all that could make his solitary voyage agreeable. For several days he proceeded at a good rate, carried along by the current of the Ganges, and would soon have reached his home, had not an unfortunate accident happened to his budgerow, which disconcerted his plans. The boat, carried down rapidly by the stream, came suddenly upon a sunken wreck, stove in part of her bottom, and filled so fast with water, that the utmost exertion of her crew could just get her hauled on shore time enough to prevent her sinking. Here, then, Melville found himself again unhoused, under a burning sun, in a part of the country of which he was entirely ignorant, and with little prospect of his boat's being soon put in a condition to prosecute the voyage; he therefore got his own bearers to bring his palanquin ashore, though from the hurry and confusion which prevailed amongst the dandies and servants, it was not accomplished until he had been for at least half an hour on the bank; when he did get into

it, he was fortunate enough to fall in with a coolie, who for a certain reward undertook to conduct his bearers to the next village, where he had hopes of getting dawk bearers to continue his journey. He charged the manjie to do all in his power to expedite the repair of the budgerow, and bring it carefully down to Benares. Leaving proper directions with his own servants, who were in charge of his baggage, he proceeded as fast as his bearers could carry him; knowing that as he had mentioned the day upon which he would probably arrive at home, his wife would be miserable at the delay. When he reached the village, he had the mortification to find, that it was impossible to procure bearers until the next afternoon, and in the night he had a severe return of his fever, brought on by the morning's exposure. He found that he was only seventy or eighty miles from Benares, and could be certain of bearers on his route, and he hoped to reach home the next forenoon; he therefore sent his own bearers back to the boat, as in his circumstances he must go dawk, and they could be of no use to him, it being impos-

sible they could keep up with him. All day he was obliged to wait in a native hut, and it was not till after sunset that he found his bearers ready to proceed with him. He had been assured that he should find a relay at the next stage, but in this he was again disappointed. The night was dark, and it rained in torrents, and when he reached the place, which fortunately happened to be a small village; there was not a bearer to be found, nor any expected for at least four and twenty hours. By some mistake, those intended for him had been given to another; and until they had performed their task, and rested after their fatigue, it was impossible that they could go on with him. Ill as he was, this again compelled him to delay. Exposure, vexation, and fatigue, had increased his fever to such an alarming height, that he was perfectly sensible that, without medical assistance, his state would be very precarious.

When his own bearers had left Major Melville in the village to which they had carried him, they returned to the boat, and found that the manjie had been fortunate enough to procure

a mistrie, who had stopped the hole, and repaired the boat in a way to admit risking the short part of their voyage they had still to make; they accordingly weighed anchor, and were again carried forward by the rapid current, at such a rate, that next morning they anchored off Benares.

Mrs. Melville had been anxiously expecting the arrival of her husband, and no sooner saw his servants enter the verandah, than she eagerly inquired, "Where is your master?"

"We left him yesterday morning at the village of Nympore to come on dawk, and if something has not gone wrong, our sahib must have been here before us."

Poor Flora, ready to sink into the earth from terror and apprehension, inquired into the cause of their master's quitting the boat, and heard with agony a full and perhaps exaggerated account of all he had suffered at Lucknow, of the danger to which he had been exposed when the boat struck, and his subsequent exposure to the sun on the bank. To her inquiries, how he had passed the night at Nympore? the

bearers without hesitation answered, "that he had been very sick, and that a great fever had come."

Unable to endure the excruciating anxiety which took possession of her mind, Mrs. Melville instantly ordered dawk bearers to be got for her palanquin, declaring her resolution to set out to meet her husband the moment it was ready ; and offered a reward to stimulate their exertions. Before sunset it was impossible to have the relays ready, though a special and well paid messenger had been dispatched for the purpose. Unfortunately, Colonel Howard was absent from cantonment, and Miss Percy, who came to her friend Mrs. Melville as soon as she heard what had occurred, did not expect him to return for at least three days.

Charlotte remained with her until the hour of her departure ; every moment, as it passed without Melville's arrival, only tended if possible to aggravate the restless misery of his wife. Charlotte, as the only possible cause of his non-appearance that she could think of with comfort, tried to persuade Flora that want of bearers

upon such an unfrequented route was the most probable reason, though the recollection of what she had witnessed at Patna, almost reproached her with endeavouring to cherish a hope which might be as grievously blighted. "You know, my dearest Flora, the apathy and indifference of the generality of native servants, and you may rest assured that they, from their love of being listened to, have rather exaggerated than concealed circumstances. I dread to think of your traversing the country alone at midnight, without even a single individual of your servants with you. Wait only until day-light."

"I dread nothing, Charlotte, but arriving too late. If you could know the devouring agony that preys upon my heart every thing else would seem little in comparison."

"Then go," said Charlotte, as the palanquin was brought to the door, "and may the blessing of God go with you; with Him there is no darkness."

"To Him I commit myself," said Flora; she kissed her friend, and laid herself back in the palanquin. "A wife's first duty is to her husband. Go on."

She was soon out of sight, and Charlotte returned into the room she had just quitted, and laying herself down on the couch from which Mrs. Melville had just risen, gave a loose to the tears, which in the presence of her friend she had repressed. When calamity has passed, the tears of a friend may fall in soothing union with those of the sufferer, but, when it is apprehended, they feed the fire which burns in the heart in deadly anticipation.

Charlotte had retained hers in compassion to the earnest glance which tried to read her very soul, and see if her thoughts corresponded with her words of comfort. "O blessed privilege," she thought, "even in the extremity of misery Flora can go to him. She can watch by him, and wait on him, and serve him. She has a right to do so, which God has sanctioned. While I—but to think on such subjects is madness."

She arose and returned home, to combat feelings which, however kept down, were always ready to struggle for mastery.

Mrs. Melville proceeded as fast as her bearers could carry her ; and though she travelled with

utter strangers in an unknown country, in the silence of night, she had no fear but of being retarded on her way. She had several rivers to cross, now swelled by the rains, but the only anxiety she experienced was that the boatmen might be in their place, and she suffered her palanquin to be lifted in and out, without bestowing a glance on the swollen waters which rushed past her. Before noon next day, she had made four stages, without meeting with any other travellers; and to all the inquiries which she made when she changed bearers, the constant answer was that none had passed that way. In the midst of the fifth stage, a shout from her bearers apprised her that another palanquin was approaching, in the direction she was going, and in a few minutes, she heard her own bearers demand, "What gentleman's palanquin comes?" "Major Melville Sahib's."

In an instant she was by his side, with a feeling of joy which almost overcame her, but when the first rapture of recognition had passed, and Melville's raised colour gave place to ashy paleness, Flora saw with a sensation such as a barbed

arrow driven into her heart might cause, that nothing had been exaggerated.

“Beloved Flora, you are come,” he said, gazing upon her face.

His accent upon the last word was more than she could bear, and she raised her hands in agony and her heart in prayers, which she dared not form into words. She dared not confess to her own mind the cause of the dread she felt; the evil was so near and terrible, that she tried to exclude from her mind its possibility, though it pressed a dead weight upon her heart. When she looked upon the altered countenance, and kissed his burning brow, a fearful anticipation took possession of her heart.

A faint smile lighted up his sunken eye, as he strained her to his bosom, and a feeling which had almost forsaken him, came back to his heart. “I would yet make an effort, Flora, for your sake. If I could reach our home, I might be better.”

Mrs. Melville caught at the hope. “Yes, Edward, yes! we ought not to lose a minute.”

The palanquins ran along side by side, until

they reached the next stage, which was merely an open shed for the shelter of the bearers. Here however Major Melville was obliged to rest for an hour; he was so ill that he could hardly bear the motion, and his anxious wife had no means of doing, or procuring any thing for his comfort; she sat by his palanquin, watching the troubled and feverish slumber into which he had fallen. When he awaked, he again wished to go on, but had not proceeded above five miles, when he found himself entirely overcome, and utterly unable to go on farther. The palanquins were both set down on the sand, for the place they were now traversing was an open sandy plain, bounded by jungles.

The bearers, perfectly aware of his situation, drew back. At that fearful moment Flora felt the utter impossibility of all below the sky to soothe the grieved spirit. To God she looked, in Him she hoped, in Him she trusted, for human help or hope she had none. Even the most common comforts of a sick chamber were beyond her reach; she was alone, with her husband in the uttermost extremity, under the

burning sun, in the midst of a desert, without a drop of any thing to moisten his parched lips, save the vinegar and water which she had taken in her palanquin. With her handkerchief she tried to bathe his heated hands and temples. Feeling himself, in the restlessness of fever, confined by the palanquin, he wished to have his matrass taken out under a tree.

Mrs. Melville made a sign to the bearers, and when it was accomplished, seeing that he was disposed to slumber, desired them to keep quiet until the cool of the evening, when they should again go on. The bearers removed the palanquins to a little distance, and remained by them, while she watched by her husband. His restless and broken sleep could not refresh him; after a long interval, in which he had not spoken, he opened his eyes. "You are come, Flora," he said, looking stedfastly upon her; "my prayer to see you again is heard."

Flora felt the full meaning of his words, though as if misunderstanding could avert them, she answered, "You knew, Edward, that as I heard of your illness, I would fly to you, and

I shall never suffer you again to move without me."

Melville gazed steadily on her agonized countenance, and answered solemnly, taking both her hands, "My love, I see you understand me."

She compressed her lips, though a nervous motion of the eyelid and nostril showed the effort she made not to interrupt him. "We have never, Flora, had concealment between us, and however painful,—God knows the agony!—it must not be now; promise, Flora, that you will do, as you have ever done,—obey me to the last."

"Yes, Melville," returned Flora, opening her lips, but scarcely moving a muscle, "while life is left me."

"Then hear me, Flora; it would be cruel to deceive you with hopes that can never be realized. I have but a few hours to be with you, and after you have promised that you will take care of yourself, my Flora, as being on earth what is dearest and most valuable to me, think that if ever you are disposed to neglect your own health, it is not what I would have done. To

God I commit you, and my unborn babe, for the sake of the crucified Redeemer, in whose righteousness we look for acceptance; for my sake, Flora, and our hopes of meeting hereafter, resignedly take from the hand of our Heavenly Father what he is pleased to send. Our union is not dissolved. I go before you, but you will come to me. In this moment, when the world retreats to an immeasurable distance, and when a bright eternity opens before me, I feel assured of it. I know in whom I have trusted." The last words sunk on his lips, he breathed a low sigh, and expired. Flora gazed stedfastly on the calm countenance before her, and in faith, followed the sainted spirit into the presence of the Eternal. No tear fell from her eye, no groan escaped her. The Lord, who has promised to make his strength perfect in weakness, upheld his suffering servant; and in that dread hour shone before her spirit. "Yes, my husband," she said, kissing his pale lips, and addressing him, as if he could still hear, "I will obey you, if my heart should break in the effort,—my selfish heart, which sorrows for its own loneli-

ness, while you are exalted to the state of the blessed."

Poor Flora was indeed lonely. The hired bearers, having their wages in advance, with little more of human feeling than the animals of burden whose task they perform, as soon as they perceived that Melville was a dying man, had taken their departure, and left her alone, with her expiring husband in the midst of the jungles, far from European assistance. But at the moment she was insensible of her absolute solitude. Her soul rose to God, and so long as it could realize His presence, was beyond the feeling of earthly sorrow; and it was not until her thoughts again fell back to earth, that she felt the blow which had fallen upon her.

She knelt by her husband's side in prayer, some time after he had ceased to breathe, in a state of mind which it is impossible to describe; her heart felt hard and dead, every feeling seemed crushed beyond the power of motion, but when a jackall's howl struck her ear, it sent a thrill of agony through every nerve, as she looked round and perceived that she was alone

—perfectly alone.—“And yet not alone, O my God,” she said, spreading her hands to heaven, “Thou art with me; thou wilt assist me, and enable me to protect him.” With convulsive eagerness she tore up the sand, and on her knees scratched the ground with both hands, until the drops of perspiration fell over her brow like rain. She looked round every now and then, at the adored object of her labour, as if to see that he was still there, and as the pit deepened, and she got into it to continue her work, she raised herself constantly to look at the calm countenance which seemed with a smile to await its conclusion. Laying herself down at full length, “Your bed, beloved, is now long enough; would to God that I might share it with you! but that may not be; you and I must remain alone.”

Tears fell so fast as to blind her, and wet the sandy pillow she had prepared; another howl reached her ear; she started upon her feet, brushed away the tears which blinded her, and after many efforts contrived to lay her husband on the couch she had made. “And is it thus,

Melville?" she said again, speaking to him, "is it thus we part? But you do not hear me,—even my voice cannot rouse you." The same sounds again were heard and nearer. "Farewell, beloved, until we meet before the throne of God;" straining the inanimate body to her heart; "this garment which you have cast off, shall yet come forth." The noise approached still nearer; spreading her handkerchief over the beloved features, she filled in the sand, as the shades of evening deepened, and the sounds of foul animals multiplied.

It was dark before she had closed the grave; when it was accomplished, she sank on her knees, and fervently exclaimed, "My God, I thank thee!" then stretched herself upon it, to guard it from intruders, and having nothing more to do, her own misery for a time overwhelmed her mind. She sobbed with convulsive anguish; overwrought nature would have relief. "What am I?—What have I become?—What has this day made me?—How have I sunk into this depth of misery?" were questions which presented themselves with wonder

and terror to her bewildered mind. She was alone in the world; all else had gone back to such a distance that there seemed nothing tangible but her husband's grave. One hour, crowded as it was with thought, appeared to her to do the work of a thousand years; and it seemed in her bereavement, that even the memory of happiness was gone from her heart, and that creation had become cold and empty, and silent and dark. Exhausted in mind and body by the exertions she had made, she lay powerless, perfectly still, stretched out on the new made grave; to move hand or foot seemed impossible; her relaxed muscles refused their office; even the spirit within her seemed paralyzed and dead. Under the first infliction it had risen triumphant on the wings of faith; then it had fallen back, and in anguish mourned, and in fear exclaimed, "What is this that has come upon me?" Now clogged by mortality, the immortal spirit seem compressed and extinguished; the body lay still, with eyes open, fixed upon the midnight heavens, but neither sigh nor groan told that the spirit was still there.

Let not those who have been soothed in their sorrows by the affection of friends, say that Flora Melville's conduct went beyond nature, or above humanity. In such circumstances they little know what the spirit, or even the feeble body of woman, can undergo. Perhaps physical exertion, by impeding mental action in extreme cases, preserves reason on her throne. Certainly the human mind can endure a variety and continuity of suffering which only He who knows what is in man can calculate.

Flora had in her utter loneliness found the assistance which God alone can give. His spirit sustained her, she felt in that hour his sure word of promise fulfilled to her, "What I have laid upon thee, I will enable thee to bear;" and though her heart bled under the trial, and though she prayed in agony that she might be spared such suffering, yet was she by His sustaining grace enabled to say, "Thy will be done," and with her own hands to commit to the dust that creature in whom she had centred every earthly hope of happiness.

Fortunately, during the night no rain fell,

and when the light of morning dawned, Flora lay still in the same condition. After the light of the sun had shone upon her eyes, weak from weeping, they seemed mechanically to close, and slumber stole over her, not to bring refreshment, but to renew her powers of feeling and suffering. When she did awake, it was under the power and delirium of fever, brought on by exposure to the sun; his rays streamed down on her unfriended head, and she aroused herself with a scream, which echoed through the surrounding jungles, crying, as she clasped her hands on her temples, "My head burns! my brain is on fire! Melville! Melville! where are you?" and looking wildly round her, "Why am I alone? what brought me here? but I suppose he is gone to take his morning ride, and I must also take exercise."

Flora, from a confused recollection of her husband's wishes on this subject, began to walk as fast as her strength would permit across the plain, when she was met by a party of woodcutters returning from their morning's work.

Surprised at seeing an European lady in such a situation, they stopped attentively to regard her; and were soon convinced, by her hurried and unequal movement, that mental disorder was the cause. Judging from her appearance that she was a person of some condition; and from her being alone, that she must have escaped from those who had the care of her, an old Hindoo, with the superstitious veneration which natives feel for those visited in mind, resolved to prevent her from meeting with harm, until her friends, who he concluded must be travellers in the neighbourhood, should come up; and for that purpose, respectfully inquired, at the same time making his salaams, "Can your slave be of use?"

Flora looked at him, and as the sound of Hindostanee had some connexion in her mind with her own servants, answered, "Yes, call my bearers." "Where is your slave to find them?"

"In the earth, I suppose, where every thing is put to keep it safe."

The old man saw he could make nothing of

that interrogation, and tried another. "You are a stranger in this country, and perhaps there may be danger in your way."

"Who says he is in danger?" asked Flora, for her memory responded to the word. "Let me go to him this instant;" and turning sharp round to the speaker, "Did you say Major Melville was in danger?"

The native was sufficiently acquainted with the nature of her disorder to know that he had now got a name which would make her speak, and by which he could perhaps make some discovery. "Major Melville waits for you," he said.

"Melville! Melville! yes, that is my name. I am Mrs. Melville;" and as if considering, "but if I am, where is my husband? Ah, I recollect it all now; he told me he should go first, and that I should follow after him. Coming, Edward, coming," and again she walked on, as fast as her strength would permit.

The Hindoo made no more attempts at conversation, but led the way to his own village at no great distance; casting a glance behind

him every now and then, to observe if she followed; before, however, she had reached it, the unnatural strength which fever had supplied, became exhausted, and she sunk on the sand. The natives alarmed, hasted to bring a coarse mat, and upon it transported her into the dwelling of her charitable conductor. The fever had by this time intermitted, and given place to a state of extreme debility and weakness, which seemed, however, from the tears which in torrents streamed down her fixed features, to be a lucid interval; or at least so much so, as to leave an impression on her mind that some dreadful change had taken place in her own circumstances. Once or twice she made a fruitless attempt to speak, without power to articulate a word. The Hindoo women by whom she was surrounded from time to time moistened her lips with lime and tamarind sherbet, the first thing which had for eight and forty hours entered her mouth.

The poor natives, who had thus by their timely assistance prevented Mrs. Melville from perishing, were perfectly sensible that they had

no means of doing for her what was farther required, and hastened to inform Mr. Newton, an indigo planter in the neighbourhood, of what had occurred; they had found the palanquins near the spot where they first discovered Mrs. Melville; and under the guidance of Mr. Newton (who came in person, as soon as the deplorable circumstances were made known to him) she was transported to his hospitable dwelling, and put to bed. When he had given every order for her comfort, and charged the woman who was to wait upon her, not to leave her for a moment, he repaired, under the guidance of the old Hindoo, to the spot where the palanquins had been found, and having discovered the new made grave, easily conjectured what had happened, and instantly sent a number of his people with bricks and mortar, to cover in the sacred spot.

CHAPTER VIII.

—————Alas we trace
The map of our own paths ; and long ere years,
With their dull steps, the brilliant lines efface,
Comes the swift storm, and blots them out in tears.
—————She had not learned
Of sorrow till that blight, and therefore turned
In weariness from life.

MRS. HEMANS.

As soon as Mrs. Melville became sensible of her own situation, her first care was to get her host to write to Miss Percy, to inform her that all was over, and that she had found shelter in the house of a European gentleman, where she would remain until she was able to travel, and that when that was the case she would give timely notice. In the mean time she earnestly prayed that Miss Percy would not think of coming to her. "Write to me, my dear Charlotte," she said, "but do not come. I cannot bear to see even you. Give me a little time to bring my will into subjection to God's. He

will enable me to accomplish it, and I shall see you, but not now."

Flora felt the utter vanity of all human consolation, the dark and dreary isolation of grief; nothing could touch her. She felt as if separated from this world, and not admitted into another; the sun of her existence seemed darkened, and all the events of life gone back to an irrecoverable distance.

Mindful of her husband's last charge, to take care of herself, and the infant she expected, she submitted her chastened spirit to the will of her Maker, and, however repugnant it might be to her natural feelings in such circumstances, made every exertion her health demanded. When she was sufficiently recovered to leave her bed, her ayah, who could no longer repress a communication, which had been a hundred times upon her lips, informed her that there was another European lady in the house, whose name nobody knew; that two or three months ago she had come there with bearers who had been paid and discharged the moment she arrived; that she had been very ill ever since,

and had never left her room; that nobody had seen her but the woman who attended upon her, and that she had been so ill last night, that they thought she would have died before morning.

All these circumstances taken with what she already knew of the wretched Mrs. Marriot, left not a doubt in the mind of Flora, that she was now under the same roof with her. "Guilty and miserable as she is," thought Flora, "I will yet see her; I may be of use to her, I may yet bring her to see the error of her ways, and, heart-stricken as I am, she may be inclined to listen to me. She cannot dread meeting me now, as she might have done before."

With this charitable intention, Flora left her room for the first time since she had been carried into it; and her ayah pointed to a door on the opposite side of the hall, saying, "The sick lady is there."

As she drew near, Flora heard a little bustle within, which made her fear that she had come too late, and the attendants in the chamber called for assistance. She hurried forward, and found that the invalid had fainted, and the

terrified natives, afraid that she might be already dead, hesitated to approach her. Mrs. Melville removed the pillows by which she was propped, and laid her gently down upon her couch, while tears fell from her eyes upon the stiff and blackened features before her. Suffering and illness had so changed the countenance, which she had last seen bright in smiles and beaming in health and hope, that she could hardly forbear exclaiming, "Can this be Harriet Panton!" as she chafed and bathed her cold face and hands. While she was thus employed, Mrs. Marriot opened her eyes, and fixed an earnest gaze on her face. With a faint shriek she covered her eyes with one hand, and with the other motioned as if she wished Flora to be gone, while she said in a low hurried voice, "If you are a spirit, leave me; and if you are still a creature of the earth, upbraid me not!"

"Harriet," said Mrs. Melville, in a tone of tenderness and sorrow, "Do you not know me? I am come to pity and assist you."

Mrs. Marriot burst into tears, bitter convul-

sive tears. It is like yourself, Flora! you only would come to such as I am!"

Softened by the sight of a friend in her misery, and humbled by a sense of her own misconduct, Mrs. Marriot at the time testified gratitude and contrition; which led Mrs. Melville to hope that she might yet repent. From this day, Mrs. Melville devoted her time to the wretched being who seemed cast upon her care. She saw that her disorder was mortal, and strove by every means in her power to alleviate her suffering, and enlighten her mind; and nothing less than the love of God, which prompted her exertions, could have enabled her worn out spirit to sustain what she had to endure. Mrs. Marriot, always fickle and capricious, varied her conduct with every turn of her disorder, and often under the influence of deceitful hope, gave way to the volatile and wayward spirit which had been her ruin. Sometimes restless and discontented, she became extremely peevish at witnessing Mrs. Melville's increasing efforts to attain self command and resignation to the

will of God, and her constant study of the Scriptures.

“I do not understand you, Flora,” she fretfully exclaimed one day, as Mrs. Melville had taken some work to do. “What can be your inducement to trouble yourself with sewing, at such a time?”

“Would to God,” she seriously replied, “that it were possible for you to comprehend the motives by which I am actuated. We are not our own, at liberty to think our own thoughts, and to do our own ways. We are bought with a price, and must in sorrow and suffering no less than in health and prosperity, strive to obey the will of Him who has purchased our obedience with nothing less than his own blood.”

“All that may be true,” said Harriet, with her usual disinclination to take the trouble of discussing things disagreeable to her, or thinking on any subject unsuited to her taste, “but I have suffered so much, and am so miserable, that even if it were in my power, I would hate to make an effort to be otherwise, unless indeed

I could forget what is passed. Can I ever again have any pleasure or any amusement in this world? and what then is the world to me? I may now tell you the truth, Flora; where is the use of concealing it! Once I thought that when I should be my own mistress, I could be happy, and so I was in a certain way, for a little while, but Marriot soon began to teize me with what people would say, and what people would think, and right and wrong, and all such stuff, just as you do now; and afterwards, West, though I had done so much for him, was not the gay and the pleasant creature he used to be. He often took silent fits, and no more saw or heard me than if I had not been present. Then perhaps I was a little out of humour with him, which did not mend the matter, though he was never cross to me."

Mrs. Melville looked at her with sorrowful surprise, and found that her own state in all its bitterness, was Paradise, compared with what she saw before her. "If he is taken from me, it is by the will of Him whose creatures we

are; the bond which united us has never been broken."

She retired to her own apartment, unable to prolong this conversation, and on her knees prayed that she might be made useful to the erring creature whom she called friend. She took all the opportunities which her situation gave her, without wearing out the patience of her hearer, to set before her our state before God, the purpose for which we were created, and our hope hereafter. She tried strongly to enforce the truth, that though every human creature desires happiness, it is unattainable in any way but that which is conformable to God's holy law, and every effort to possess it in any other way, is like sowing the whirlwind, to reap the tempest.

Harriet listened to these conversations with various degrees of interest, according to the feeling which happened to predominate. "As to duties," she said, "that was all very well for people born in a low sphere of life, who had their bread to earn; but for people of fortune, she did not see what was the use of it, if they

could not employ it after their own pleasure; and happiness—she had tried for it, and missed it, and was weary of the chase. That it was unkind to remind her of her sins (if they must be called by such a name); at all events, there were many people who had done as much amiss, without suffering so much for it.” Sometimes, overcome by Flora’s kindness, she would for a few minutes seem to listen; but her mind, fatigued by the slightest exertion of thought, and suffering under bodily pain, soon turned from the subject with lassitude it was impossible to overcome. “I am dying, Flora, I am dying; leave me to go out of the world in peace. I care for nothing in it.”

Flora felt the misery of those who hear of “peace” when there is no peace, and retired from these hapless conversations, to pour out on her knees her heart before God, in earnest supplications for the descent of the regenerating influence of his blessed Spirit upon their unhappy object.

Mrs. Melville had, during Mrs. Marriot’s illness, written to and heard from Miss Percy,

who had earnestly wished that her uncle might be permitted to go to the indigo factory, knowing that his presence would be of use to Flora ; but Mrs. Marriot declared that the idea of his being in the neighbourhood was more than she could bear ; and even if she never saw him, the knowledge that he was near would kill her. “ No ! no ! Flora, you are the only creature I can bear to see. He wrote me such a letter ; and he knows too much ; and he must have made Charlotte acquainted with all these things. If you do not wish to see me die before you, do not let them come ; promise that you will forbid it.”

“ I would wish, Harriet, to do all in my power to please you, but this would be for your advantage, and it would be a comfort for me.”

“ No, no ! it would make *me* more miserable ; and you, Flora, bear all with such resignation,” answered Mrs. Marriot, with her accustomed selfishness, “ that you will do this for me. It is the last request I shall ever make ; do not deny it.”

Flora, overcome by her earnestness, made the

promise, and retired to write to Miss Percy what she had done.

Colonel Howard, when this letter was received at Benares, agreed with Charlotte that the subject could be pressed no farther. He hoped that the exertion which Flora was obliged to make, might be of great service to herself, by calling out her thoughts to the contemplation of a case infinitely more deplorable. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" and is not the harsh and bitter medicine which he sometimes uses, more effectual to heal the wounded spirit than all the balm of friendly attention, which often enervates when it is meant to strengthen? Colonel Howard had suffered; he knew what it was to suffer, and he felt that the youthful heart, which hopes that to-morrow will be as this day, and much more abundant, when struck in its career, must, like the prodigal son, have time to come to itself.

As Mrs. Marriot's complaint increased, it was accompanied by constant fever; the violent affection of the liver under which she laboured rendered her restless and weary. She could

not remain an instant in the same position, she turned from one side to the other, and had her pillows raised and lowered, without obtaining a moment's relief. "Laudanum, Flora, give me laudanum," she murmured. "I would sleep and be at rest."

"I dare not, the doctor, to whom Mr. Newton has written a statement of your case, has forbidden it. Dearest Harriet, be patient."

"Patience! patience! who talks of patience? I never was patient! Give me laudanum, though all the doctors in the world should forbid it: give me laudanum!"

"It is poison! dearest Harriet, for your own sake, for my sake, refrain."

"No, Flora! I never can bear this! nothing shall prevent me from taking it!" and she rose with a desperate effort to catch at the bottle which stood by her bed. The exertion ruptured the abscess, and she fell back upon her pillow, a corpse!

Flora groaned through her closed teeth, as she witnessed this departure of an immortal spirit to give an account of the deeds done in

the body; she sunk back upon the chair from which she had started to prevent Harriet from seizing the laudanum, and was carried out of the room.

Mr. Newton gave immediate orders for the funeral, and his own carpenters prepared a coffin, and his gardeners dug a grave under a large tamarind tree, beyond the garden. As soon as Mrs. Melville had brought her mind to a state to undergo what was yet before her, she returned to take a last look at one who had been dear to her. The climate, and the nature of her complaint had produced a fearful change, and she shuddered when she looked upon all that remained of the once beautiful and lovely Harriet Panton. It was the anniversary of the day upon which they landed in Calcutta. Mrs. Melville recollected the circumstance.

“This day twelve months,” she thought, “we all arrived in the pride of youth and expectation: now, what is she? and what am I?”

A burst of tears followed the painful conviction, that the hopes of earthly felicity then indulged, had been in her own case realised; and

had fled like a morning dream, to show her what trust could be placed in youth, and health, and love, as a foundation for happiness.

She took up the hand which still remained stretched out, as if to accomplish the wishes of its mistress. "You have caused your own fate, and perhaps mine." She shuddered, as she recollected that Melville's life had been the sacrifice to West's loss of the treasure; but she repelled the thought. "No, no! it cannot be. 'Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.'"

She folded the sheet, upon which Mrs. Marriot was laid, over the inanimate form; female assistance she had none; the native woman who was in attendance upon herself, like all others, shrunk from contact with the dead, and there were no native Portuguese, or Christians of any denomination in that neighbourhood, excepting Mr. Newton and his country born assistant. They, however, as soon as the coffin was prepared, placed the body in it, fastened down the nails, and decently covered it with a white linen cloth; at sunset they carried it between them to the

newly opened grave, where it was no sooner deposited, dust to dust, than Mr. Newton's bricklayers covered it over with a defence of masonry, to guard it from intrusion.

"All is past and gone," was the thought which filled Mrs. Melville's mind, as she drew near the quiet spot, after every one had left it. "In this country, every thing changes with appalling rapidity; and leaves nothing behind to show what has been, but a newly covered grave. Such is life in India, and brilliant and beautiful as may often be its path, it ends here:" and tears fell fast on the dark and narrow house of one who had often thought the whole world too little for her own accommodation.

Mrs. Melville had never in her conversations with Mrs. Marriot once mentioned Major Melville's name; she felt as if it would have been profanation to bring it into such society. Nothing but her disinterested desire for Harriet's welfare here and hereafter, could have enabled her at times to bear with the sentiments she uttered, so repugnant to her own. Now death had silenced them for ever, and as she leaned

over the wet grave, she was more disposed to recollect the creature she had first known, than her she had last seen.

Mrs. Melville had been now three weeks an inmate of the indigo factory, and Mr. Newton, with the generous hospitality and friendly delicacy which so often characterize the intercourse even of strangers in India, had caused a simple monument to be erected over the body of Major Melville, on the spot where the hands of his wife had laid him. It stood a little back from the road, under an immense banian tree, and was shaped pyramidally, to save it as much as possible from the speedy decay which the continual dropping of the leaves must otherwise have caused. A plain stone, "Inscribed to the memory of Major Edward Melville, aged thirty-two," told, that the monument was "erected as a token of respect to his memory, and the conduct of his faithful wife, by a stranger." It was inclosed round to guard it from the intrusion of man or beast.

After the termination of Mrs. Marriot's sufferings, Mrs. Melville had nothing further to

detain her ; she requested Mr. Newton to procure bearers to convey her to Benares, where she was now anxious to be. Mr. Newton, in every thing willing to forward her wishes, did as she required, and to save the loss of time which waiting for Colonel Howard would occasion, he proposed himself to see her safely to her journey's end. To speak of trouble or fatigue to one who had already done so much, Mrs. Melville felt would be superfluous ; she thankfully accepted his proposal, and fixed the next day but one for her departure, when it might be expected the necessary arrangements should be made.

Before leaving the place, Mrs. Melville wished earnestly to see with her own eyes, what she understood the kindness of her host had done to guard the remains of all that she had ever loved, but she dreaded the effects of the agitation it must produce. Yet it was not for herself that she feared, but for the hopes now awakened, that she would have a living memorial of him she had lost. She kept in mind his last request, and in obedience to it, she resolved that she would go

no farther, and remain no longer, than just to satisfy herself with a sight of the precise spot where he reposed. "I shall carry the recollection with me," she said, when she saw it, "and if I go to Europe, I shall, when I see the moon, know exactly how it shines there."

Mrs. Melville arrived at Benares without accident, and found Colonel Howard and Miss Percy waiting at her own house to receive her. They were both shocked to witness her pale silent spectral appearance. The natural fairness of her complexion had become so very clear, that she looked like a creature of another world, come to look on, but take no part in the things of this. Colonel Howard behaved to her with the affection of a tender parent, and warmly expressed his approbation of the part she had acted by the misguided Harriet. He left Miss Percy to remain with her friend, and took the worthy Mr. Newton home with him, as he meant to rest the night, and return with the same bearers next day. From him Colonel Howard heard a detail of every thing that had passed at

his house ; and also most of the circumstances which had preceded Mrs. Melville's reaching it.

Some of the dawk bearers who had that day travelled with him, were the same who had been with Major Melville, and they without hesitation confessed that it was impossible for them to touch a dead body, and they had therefore left him. To Mr. Newton's inquiry, " Why they had not sought the assistance of any other person ? " the answer was, " We are dawk bearers, and it is not our work."

" My house is not a mile from the spot, and had I been apprized of her distress in time, Major Melville's life might have been saved, or at all events much suffering spared to his estimable wife. From the villagers who first met her I heard of her lamentable state, and nothing but her youth, unbroken constitution, and piety of mind, could have carried her through what she has suffered." Colonel Howard expressed the surprize he had felt at finding Mrs. Marriot was in a part of the country at such a distance from what he could have expected. " I caused

every inquiry to be made for her," he said, "without effect."

"I," answered Mr. Newton, "happened to be travelling in that part of the country at the time the catastrophe happened which terminated the follies and crimes of poor West, and the very next morning I met Mrs. Marriot's palanquin. From the questions her bearers asked of my people, I found they were quite unacquainted with the country; and, upon myself making some inquiries, I soon gathered from them the leading particulars of the deplorable history. Pitying Mrs. Marriot's youth and helplessness, I offered my services, and finding that she had no plan for the future, nor any friend to whom she could apply for assistance, I proposed that she should make use of my house until she had time to form a better arrangement. My offer was thankfully accepted; the only condition she annexed was that I should never mention her name, nor make her existence known. The bearers she had then with her were paid and discharged, and she travelled dawk with me, until we reached my

house. Symptoms of illness had already begun to show themselves, and sinking under her suffering of mind and body, she almost constantly kept her bed. My factory is at a great distance from medical assistance, but I wished to send to the nearest station and procure it. This, however, she positively objected to, threatening to put a period to her existence if I persisted. I was thus compelled to content myself with sending a written statement of her case, and proceeding by the directions received. From the commencement I saw that her disorder was an affection of the liver, and could she have been persuaded to use the proper means, it might not perhaps have terminated as it did, but she was fatally addicted to the use of laudanum, as the easiest way to quiet pain, and procure the sleep which she no doubt was in want of."

"Unfortunate girl!" said the Colonel; "I made every exertion to discover the place in which she had taken refuge, and could I have found her, my niece, Mrs. Bently, would have

received her, with the consent of her husband ; as certainly nothing less than the circumstances in which dear Mrs. Melville met her, would have warranted her being brought under the same roof with Miss Percy."

On the next day Mr. Newton took leave of all his new made friends, not without a promise to Colonel Howard to make his house his home when he revisited Benares. Mrs. Melville could not part without regret from one who had acted by her the part of a brother, and whose feeling attention to the memory of her husband would of itself been enough to ensure her lasting gratitude and esteem. They separated, therefore, with mutual feelings of regard and respect ; and Colonel Howard promised from time to time to inform Mr. Newton how things went with them.

Colonel Howard, as executor of the late Mr. Marriot, took all the requisite steps on the death of his miserable wife, and transmitted that information to her father, who was then in Calcutta, busied in preparations for his marriage with the accomplished Miss Owen. Selfish and

heartless as his poor daughter, the only interest he seemed to take in the intelligence was, that her death entitled him to succeed, as her heir, to the fortune left her by the generosity of her husband; and when he communicated the circumstances to his bride elect, the only remark she made was, that “ ’twas fortunate Mrs. Marriot died without a will, by which she might have given away her property to some of the people about her, who must have had some expectation of the kind, otherwise they never could have countenanced such conduct as hers.”

“Fortunate indeed,” returned the father; “I did not think of that, but it must have been as you say; no one having your sense of propriety could have held intercourse with her. I had resolved never to see her face; fortunately we are relieved from all trouble on that account, and I shall write to Colonel Howard.” “There are some fine jewels,” said the bride, “which ought not to be lost.”

“Certainly not, they are yours by right,” answered the bridegroom.

Colonel Howard had made allowance for the

natural indignation of a parent, smarting under the sense of a child's disgrace, but he could make none for the letter he now received. It commenced by thanking him for his polite attention, and went on to state that "in consequence of the intelligence conveyed, Mr. Panton, as heir at law, thought proper to state his claims to the executors of the late Mr. Marriot and his deceased wife, and claimed the money, jewels, and other effects, left by the will of Mr. Marriot to his aforesaid wife." Colonel Howard, after reading this heartless epistle, and finding that it was actually written and signed by Mr. Panton, threw it from him with contempt. "Is it possible," he said, taking up the letter again, and handing it to his niece, who entered the room as he spoke, "that a father, afflicted by one of the severest trials which can reach a parent's heart, could have written that base scrawl? Could he know, that his guilty child had been summoned almost in the midst of her crimes, and only think of the trash she left behind her? Could he bear to think that she had been laid in her obscure grave by the charity of strangers? that they had

tended her by day, and watched her by night, and yet not have expressed one word of gratitude or thanks?"

Charlotte took the letter from her uncle's hand, and ran over it with feelings of sorrowful surprise. She had not sufficient experience of the world to know, that such hardened selfishness could exist, and she felt the sorrow which every ingenuous mind naturally must experience at the discovery of unexpected worthlessness.

It was not without a painful sacrifice to his own feelings that Colonel Howard brought himself to answer such a letter. When he did, he confined himself to a plain business-like statement, as if he had been addressing a lawyer instead of a father. As the executor of the late Mr. Marriot he was quite ready to render an account to the proper authorities. The management of this business led Colonel Howard into a correspondence with Mr. Fortescue, who, as being upon the spot, was empowered to act in realizing the property which had been left at Cawnpore. Colonel Howard had written to him every particular of Mrs. Melville's loss, her

conduct, and sufferings, in short, everything that had occurred to her and Mrs. Marriot since their meeting at Mr. Newton's house, and received in answer a letter so different from Mr. Panton's contemptible production, that in the wrath which the latter excited he could not forbear showing it to Charlotte. "Read that," he said, warmly; "it will restore your good opinion of human nature, which the other has so much shaken, that I almost regret having shown it to you."

"This is a long letter, my dear uncle; if you will give me permission, I shall take it to my own room and read it at leisure."

"Do; or you may read it here, without interruption. I am going out on poor Mrs. Melville's business, for Melville has left a will by which I am executor."

"I am thankful to hear it. It will be the means of reconciling Dr. and Mrs. Dundas to Flora's remaining with us for the present."

When her uncle was gone, Charlotte retired to her own room, still holding the letter in her hand, as if afraid to read it. "I had better

not," she thought; "but what reason can I give to my uncle for not having done so, when he asks my opinion?"

The perusal of this letter had, indeed, the effect which the Colonel anticipated when he gave it. She dwelt upon Fortescue's sentiments until she forgot that there was cruelty, or selfishness, or avarice in the world. When she read the ardent expression of his admiration of the conduct of Mrs. Melville, and his opinion that Melville's fate was to be envied, she folded the letter on her bosom, and burst into tears. There are times when the sentiments of another come before our minds as if they were prompted by an influence felt and acknowledged, though unseen, and as if the soul of the absent or the dead could hold communion with ours, and leave with us the impress of their feelings.

"I was present with him when he wrote this, as he is now with me! But it is criminal to indulge such thoughts."

Charlotte Percy saw the line of duty too clearly to deceive herself regarding its require-

ments of her; and, though sometimes deceived by the deceitfulness of the human heart, was no sooner aware of her danger than she struggled to get free, and clung more closely to Him who is alone able to save from falling. Folding up the letter, she laid it upon her uncle's dressing-table, and returned to Mrs. Melville, who, by studious exertion, tried to acquire the self-command which she knew to be indispensable to the right performance of the duties to which she was bound. She knew resignation was not a passive indulgence of vain sorrow, but an active discharge of constantly recurring duties.

As Miss Percy had expected, Mrs. Dundas wrote to Mrs. Melville, entreating her to return to the gardens; and saying that Dr. Dundas would go dawk to Benares to conduct her. The letter was all the tenderest friendship could dictate; but Mrs. Melville preferred, in the present circumstance, remaining where she was. "Where can I be better, Charlotte, than with your uncle and you? I fear I have not courage to return to the gardens at present. I shall write, and tell my dear aunt so, and that I shall

at least remain here until after my confinement." Miss Percy was certain that, when the motive of this decision was known, Mrs. Dundas would not only be satisfied but approve it.

Mrs. Bently heard all that had taken place from her sister, and Bently again from her. He was absent on the service in which Melville had lost his life, and his wife, while she sorrowed for her poor friend Mrs. Melville, could not divest herself of dread that the fate might be her own. From him she had received a regular account of all O Meer Sing's exploits, and the circumstances connected with them, and she trembled to think that her husband would probably be kept out during the whole of the rains. Even if something sudden and dreadful did not take place, her mind was kept in a constant state of agitation by the number of contradictory reports, always in circulation in a military cantonment. From Mr. Fortescue she had met with the kindest attention ; he spared no pains to procure for her the earliest and most authentic information. He had been detained by public business

at the station, much longer than he could have expected, but now another Judge had been permanently appointed, who was every day expected, and Fortescue would then return to Calcutta.

CHAPTER IX.

There watching high the least alarms,
Thy rough bold fortress gleams afar ;
Like some bold veteran grey in arms,
And marked with many a seamy scar :
The ponderous wall and massy bar,
Grim rising o'er the rugged rock,
Have oft withstood assailing war,
And oft repelled th' invader's shock.

BURNS.

O MEER SING, as soon as he received the shot which disabled his left arm, lost not a moment in effecting his escape to a cave in the jungles, which was commonly used as a kind of store-house by himself and gang. Here he resolved to shelter himself until the first hurry of pursuit was over, and his wound should permit him to seek a better refuge. He had at the moment of mounting given Byram instructions to watch and harass the movements of Captain Bently's party ; and, as soon as it could be

done with impunity, to bring him information of all that passed. We have already seen, how those directions were obeyed. When the sepoys at their departure set fire to the funeral pile which they had erected, the flame in an instant crackled through the whole of the dry mass, and throwing up showers of burning fragments set fire to the long grass and dry leaves, which quickly communicated to the neighbouring huts, and wrapped the whole place in flames.

How far this conflagration might have spread, it is impossible to say, had not the deluge of rain which fell that night extinguished it. As it was, the Pindarees, by its wasteful progress, were burnt out of cover at a time it was most wanted, and were forced during the night to screen themselves in the retreat of their leader. It was impossible for O Meer Sing to remain in his present situation during the rains; and equally so in his wounded state to take a long journey. He therefore resolved upon throwing himself into the fort of Ravelgur, which belonged to his friend Man Sing, an independant

Rajah. This would undoubtedly be purchasing protection at the most expensive rate, for he well knew that it would not be a small sum that would induce the Rajah to run the risk of drawing upon himself the displeasure of Government; but in his present desperate circumstances he had no other alternative; and he trusted that he should be able to make his movements in such secrecy, that he should have time to collect his troop, and make his escape into the Mahratta States, before his hiding place was discovered.

“If we remain to draw the dogs after us here,” he said, addressing Byram, “the fruits of many years’ hard work will be lost, and perhaps the faith of our men; for when had ever a poor leader trusty followers? Too much is gone last night; and the hired slaves have had a taste of prey which will only make them greedy for more.”

“O Meer Sing speaks the word of truth,” answered his second, “and I will go to Man Sing and set this matter right; and I will try to make a good bargain with him; no need to

tell him all ; but I must not go empty handed ; let me choose a present."

"Take this row of pearls," said O Meer Sing, opening a coffer, "none finer ever came from Ceylon ; and take this diamond, and be sure you make it shine in his eyes—he will be a happy man when he sets it upon his turban. Do you recollect the night when we got it from the diamond merchants of Golconda ? And here are pistols wrought with gold and set with gems, fit for any king that ever sat on the musnud of Timor. Tell him that his friend O Meer Sing lays them at his feet, and to-morrow will make a visit to him in his fort."

"Sweet words, and things beautiful to look upon, make rough ways smooth," observed Byram, as he carefully folded up his costly offering. "If I bring good news, expect me to night ; if not, let every one keep to the other meeting place, for it will be dangerous to return here."

After the departure of his ambassador, O Meer slept out the day, according to native custom when unemployed, and before sunset was upon the watch for the return of his lieutenant.

“Your presence is good news,” he said, as Byram advanced through one of the intricate paths of the forest.

“Yes, but I have expended much to bring it. The tree that yields protection will not grow without showers of gold.”

“And the troop? I do not put myself into any man’s hand without them.”

“Yes, the troop too; but it was only when he heard there were not more than fifty men with you, that he would give leave for them to come.”

“Well, well, this is no time to dispute about little things, and mind you, that no man sleeps after we are there, without having one eye open while the other is shut. Tell our men to be ready to move as soon as day breaks to-morrow morning; but after they have quitted the forest, they must divide into small parties, that they may procure doolies, without observation; it would not do to be seen.”

The Rajah, unwilling to draw attention upon himself, or to set his people upon inquiring what the arrival of so many strangers could

mean, determined to give out, that the females of his family expected a visit from some of their relations, and ordered that the wounded men of the gang, who carried the rupees he was to receive, should personate the expected visitants, and arrive in covered doolies like women, while the rest should pass as their bearers. This would effectually throw dust in the eyes of the garrison, and account for the strangers remaining as long as might be necessary.

“To secure time for our wounds to heal, before others are made,” said Byram, “it will be well to send this English sahib on a wrong scent; and perhaps the air of the jungles, and the weather may help us, more than our swords have yet done. Joheil has been taken prisoner, and I have given Ram Chund his lesson. He knows that work, and will contrive to come near Joheil, and give him news when there are more ears to hear it.”

“It is a wise thought,” answered O Meer Sing; “our troop is so scattered, and so many of our horses have been lost, that it would be

running into the tiger's mouth, to think of meeting the sepoy's at present."

"Yes, yes, though O Meer Sing and Byram never feared the face of man, it would not be well to let men like ours meet trained soldiers, unless we had numbers to dash upon them like the tempest. Our path is like the wind, our coming is not seen, and we leave no trace behind us, but the mischief we have done.

"It is impossible to take my horse into the fort," said O Meer Sing; "if it should be necessary to fly from it I might lose him, and the best day's work ever done, would not make up for his loss."

"No," answered Byram, "it will be better to send Gopal with the horses to the other side of the river. He can pass in disguise with them like a horse merchant, and keep them in the old Hindoo temple in the jungle until he hears from us. Three or four must go with him, in sice's clothes."

The important matter relative to Ally Buxus being settled, and all other requisite distributions made, O Meer Sing and his troop were

next day in a place, which at least promised security until he and several of them who had suffered, should have time to recover from their wounds.

Bently, during the first fall of rain, had encamped upon the spot where he had pitched his tents on the evening before his attack upon the encampment in the forest; and as soon as the weather permitted, dispatched scouts to bring him an exact account of the movements of the Pindarees. From them he heard, that the place, which the fire had reduced to a blackened mass of ruins, was now entirely deserted, and that they had every reason to believe that the decoits had completely evacuated the forest. During the time that Bently was detained in the neighbourhood, his little encampment was frequented by several merchants of petty wares. The knowledge that the sepoy had money, was of itself sufficient to attract them. One of these had visited every tent upon the ground, and in his anxiety to dispose of his goods had made his way, even into the tent where the prisoner was confined, as far as the sentinels would permit.

The following night happened to be very dark, and Captain Bently ordered that a very strict watch should be kept to prevent surprise. One sentry was posted before the small tent of the prisoner, and another behind. The former, on turning shorter than he had done in his first rounds, fancied he saw something move in the dark, and steadily fixed his eye upon the place; but all was quiet. "It might be a jackall, or it might be a wolf; and it would be ridiculous to fire and attract the notice of the whole world, and bring a general laugh upon himself." He again tried to discover what it might be, but without success, and keeping a watchful ear to every sound, he continued to walk his round. When he had again faced to the opposite direction, and returned to the same spot, he was met by the subadar, who had kept a good look out. He now clearly perceived, between him and the tent, the body of a man laid flat upon the sand, who had in this manner, when his back was turned, crept forward, and, when he faced round, remained still. The sentry pointed out the object to the subadar, as he levelled his musket

with the intention of firing, but the other made a signal of silence, and, both removing to a little distance, he whispered, "As there is but one man, it would be better to let him reach the tent, which we can easily surround by the relief guard, who are just now coming up, and by this means hear the talk of the two, which may be useful."

The plan was accordingly followed, and the spy took the opportunity to insinuate his body under the covering of the tent. As soon as he was there, he awakened the sleeping prisoner, and commenced with him a whispering conversation, not so low however but that the purport of it was heard by those who, without the tent, turned an open ear to all that passed within.

"Meet us in the ruins at Delhi. O Meer Sing will be there before us. It is impossible with your wound, Joheil, that, if you could make your escape to-night, you could travel; for that reason you must keep quiet, and when you are well enough, try sweet words with the sahib; tell him, that for the good he has done to you, you will show him the lion's den, and take care that

you take him far enough from the place I have told you."

The spy, who was perfectly acquainted with the part he was performing, had become aware that he was watched, and knew that to seize and to shoot him upon the spot would be the first act of the listeners if they caught him; therefore, while he was speaking, he had carefully surveyed the little place in which his companion lay bound, and caught hold of a rope which hung from the tent pole. He was well aware that the instant he had developed his plans they would be upon him, and ere the last sound had died upon his lips, he had, by the help of the cord, like a cat, scrambled to the top of the tent, where, with a large crooked knife he cut a hole in the canvas, and dropped on the ground on the outside, just as the subadar and sepoy in a body rushed in at the opposite opening. To see that the bird was flown, and to discharge their muskets in the direction which he had followed, was the work of another moment; but here again his experience foiled them. He expected the fire, and had thrown himself flat on

the ground. When the pieces were discharged, he started on his feet, and ran for life.

The reports instantly brought the whole party (except the sentries upon duty) to the spot; but it was too late, for the jungle was too near. Foiled and disappointed, the subadar recounted to Captain Bently the intelligence which they had overheard. That, at least, seemed some compensation for the escape of its artful conveyer. The tidings seemed so probable that it did not enter into any one's mind to suspect the deceit which had been practised. The sepoys and native officers were of opinion that the prisoner should be instantly put to death, but Bently again repeated what he had already told them when the decoit fell into their hands, that no white gentleman could take the life of a wounded prisoner, whatever his crimes might be, and therefore he would still adhere to his first intention of delivering him over to the civil power, and for that purpose next morning conveyed him with a proper escort to the nearest police station. When this was accomplished, Bently again gave orders for renewing their

march, and proceeded as fast as the broken roads and swollen rivers would permit, until they reached the once splendid city of Delhi, now surrounded by a desolate wilderness of ruins, like the neighbourhood of Agra.

Ram Chund had contrived to hide himself in the vicinity of Captain Bently's encampment, until he saw that he and the sepoy had quitted it, and taken the Delhi road. Rejoicing over the success of his stratagem, he then returned to join his leaders in Ravelgur, and receive the praises due to his dexterity. After the entrance of the supposed visitants to the ladies of the keil-ladar's* family, he had, in respect to them, given orders that during their stay no one should be permitted to enter the fort without a particular permission from him. His son, however, who, wearied of the dull monotony of such a life, had in an excursion which he made at a little distance fallen in with a Nautch company, invited them to follow him to the fort. At first they hesitated, as they seemed to be bent upon ano-

* Proprietor and governor of a fort.

ther direction, but as one of their number was sick, which was a great hindrance to them, and the young Rajah promised large payment, and permission to depart when they chose, they consented to exhibit their talents for his amusement. At his summons the formidable gates were opened, and his retinue entered without question. O Meer Sing had now been a month in Ravelgur, had perfectly recovered the use of his arm, and had the satisfaction to hear that a large detachment of his troop was upon its way to join him. Weary of his inactive life, he resolved, in disgust, to witness the nautch given by the young Rajah. For this purpose he repaired with the crowd to the splendidly lighted hall, and between the intervals of the performance overheard the news as it was told by the different groups of listeners. In this way he gathered that the Company's troops had arrived at Delhi, and that every search was making in that neighbourhood for his own apprehension.

Another singer now commenced a wild and plaintive air. As soon as her voice struck his ears, he turned suddenly round, with one of those

peculiar looks which have been already noticed. Their eyes met, and he at a glance recognized the beautiful features of Rizia, the Phansygar girl, who had in her well-acted distress in vain claimed his pity. Disconcerted by this circumstance, he at first hesitated whether he should not effect an instant escape, not knowing how many of his former acquaintance might be there also; but she continued her song, seemingly without the least symptom of recognition, and the thought passed from his mind. However, it warned him that his fame was too far spread to admit of his being seen in public, and he made no further appearance at the nautches which were given every night while the musicians remained in the fort.

Not so the wily Rizia. She was too experienced an observer to be mistaken in the flash of that black eye, and too deadly a foe ever to forgive those who had escaped out of her hands. As soon as her public performance was over, she took every opportunity to discover what had become of the man who she was determined should not twice escape her, and by her artful inquiries

regarding those who had come into the fort since the transaction in which she had borne such a share, soon solved the mystery of the covered doolies, and found means to satisfy herself with her own eye that the supposed ladies and their bearers were fighting men. "I have found something," she said to one of her brothers in trade, who was, like herself, disguised as a musician. "Do you recollect the man with the black horse near Agra?"

"O Meer Sing, you mean, who gave his treacherous friend into our hands? Yes! yes! His works are not to be forgotten. What news of him?"

"He is here, in this fort, at this moment."

"In this fort, say you? It can never be that we should deal with him here. The iron gates would close upon us."

"Chi! chi! do you think that I do not know better; and are your ears so heavy that you have never heard of the price that is set upon his head? He made us to serve his purpose once, and I shall make him to serve ours now. It is a pity that such a man should fall by other hands

than ours. But if we cannot throw the noose ourselves, there is no reason why we should not get those to do it who may do it in the light of the sun, and call the world to look at them."

"You are wise, Rizia; wise as the snake who charms while he kills."

"Sickness is gone from our brother," she said; "to-morrow let us go: our work must not cool, nor another take our prey from between our teeth."

"What is your thought?" he demanded. "The wolf dare not be seen in the streets of the city, and I must keep out of the way."

"You are a fool, and only fit to tighten the noose when another has thrown it. I will take this work into my own hands, or let the rope be upon my neck that grew for his. None but this man has seen me in my power and gone back to tell the tale, and he cannot cross my way at present."

On the morrow, when the nautch party demanded their dismissal, many objections were made by the son and heir, and all who had taken pleasure in hearing the fine voice of the

beautiful Rizia. She, however, feigned a vow to perform a religious pilgrimage; and promised that as soon as it was accomplished she would return. This was of course reason irresistible, and having received the stipulated payment, the company of wandering vagrants were permitted to depart.

Her first care was to purchase a horse and man's apparel, in which disguise (making a bundle of her own), she set forward as fast as her horse could carry her, goaded on by the spirit of avarice and revenge. Public report spoke loudly of the exploits of O Meer Sing, and of the diligent search which was now making after him by the Company's troops encamped on the plain. Thither therefore she rode, and leaving her steed under the care of the first sentry, as a proof of upright intention, she demanded to be conducted before Captain Bently.

As soon as his orderly had complied with her request, she made several profound salaams, and in a steady well-modulated voice proceeded to inform the Sahib, "that his name had filled the world, and it had come to the ears of his slave,

that he had left his own home, to catch one who had done much bad work."

"You have heard right," answered Bently; "and if you can help me to take O Meer Sing, there is a reward."

"What is the reward, and how is your slave to receive it?"

"Fifty thousand rupees, and when he is in my hands, I shall give an order upon the Company's treasury here in Delhi, and it shall be paid on the spot."

"It is not your slave that can give this news, but one of his nautch company; and that one will be here to wait the Sahib's pleasure before sunset."

"Remember, fifty thousand rupees, paid down when he is in my hands, is the reward," said Bently; and the youth, with the same respectful air he had used in entering, made his salaams, and departed.

At the appointed time, a palanquin appeared, bearing the beautiful Rizia; she demanded, as before, to speak with the Sahib, and as it was known that a nautch woman was expected, she

was instantly admitted. The subadar, by Captain Bently's direction, was in waiting to witness the promised communication. Rizia, as before, salaamed to the ground (for it is the mode of salutation used equally by men and women). She was splendidly dressed in her nautch attire ; her delicate arms were covered with jewels, and her fingers with rings ; having seated herself upon a low morah * at the door, where she took off her shoes, she waited in silence.

Captain Bently began : " A young man, who was here this morning, promised that you would give information where I may take O Meer Sing, and I now repeat to you the offer which I then made to him, fifty thousand rupees, as a reward, when he is in my hands through your means."

" The word of an English gentleman is equal to an oath on the Koran. O Meer Sing is now in the fort of Ravelghur."

" Impossible ! " said Bently.

" It is a lie ! " said the subadar.

* Footstool.

“No, sahib, no,” she answered meekly, “why should I tell a lie? your slave speaks truth, and if you will hear, her words will show you the whole matter.”

“Speak on,” answered the subadar, “but remember, you are speaking before a Sahib, who will not let lies go unpunished.”

“You remember, Sahib,” she said, addressing Captain Bently, without heeding the threats of the subadar, “the night when the spy came to your tents, and told the lies which brought you here? All that was agreed between him and his leaders, as I very well know.”

“But he ran the risk of his life,” said Bently; “it is a wonder he was not shot.”

“His *nisib* is on his forehead; it was not to fall then; but that very night O Meer Sing and his brethren were in the fort of Ravelghur; he took a good *nuyur* * to the Rajah, and he and they were allowed to go in like women, in covered *doolies*.”

“Wah, wah!” said the subadar, drawing

himself back with an action of surprise; "I remember that I heard that the mother of the young Rajah had received a visit from some of her house."

"Yes, and when the young Rajah returned to the fort, I went with him, and saw O Meer Sing at a nautch."

"But how do you know O Meer Sing?" demanded the subadar.

"What is that to you?" returned the informer boldly, being quite certain of the ground on which she stood. "My song has been heard in King's courts, and Rajah's palaces, and those who have seen O Meer Sing once, and the glance of his eye, and the salt of it, will never forget it."

"She has shown his face," observed the subadar, thoughtfully.

"Yes, and I can show more. His left arm, which was broken, is now well."

"True again; but did you speak with him?"

"No; but I spoke with those from whom he keeps nothing back, and who laughed well, when they heard the march you had taken here."

“ If this news is true, when are you to receive your money ?” asked Captain Bently.

“ Your slave will send the young man of our company, who came to lay this information under the sahib’s feet, back with the sepoy to the fort, and when the thief is caught, to him will the sahib give the order for the money.”

“ Agreed ; let him be here before daybreak to-morrow morning.”

“ Your orders are obeyed,” said Rizia ; making her salaams as she rose, and taking up her shoes, she stepped into the palanquin, and was conveyed away as she came.

When she was gone, Captain Bently turned to his subadar, and asked, “ What are we to think of this. That woman has, I believe, told the truth, but how could she come by it ? Has Man Sing sent her with this information ? ”

“ No, sahib, no ; Rajah Man Sing is a rajpout ; he is of my caste, and could never stain his hands with such dirty work.”

“ If he is of your caste, indeed, we may trust him. But what is your opinion of this woman’s motive ? ”

“To get the rupees. Such as she would sell their father for money. It is plain, that some fool has trusted her with more than woman ought to know. Women are wicked enough by nature, without giving them knowledge to make them more so. They were made for domestic animals, and when they are out of the house, they wander in the ways of evil.”

“They are not much indebted to your good opinion I find,” returned his commanding officer; “however, we shall have time to speak of this after. In the meantime, give orders for our march at daybreak, and when it is done, return to me.”

When the subadar had, in conformity to his orders, put all things in train, he returned to Captain Bently's tent, to give him all the information he had been able to collect regarding the fort. None of the sepoy's had ever been there, but they all agreed that it was spoken of as a place of great strength, and, like the generality of hill forts in that part of the country, perched aloft upon the top of a steep rock, rising inaccessible from the plain.

“It is my idea,” said Captain Bently, “that the keilladar will not have the madness to refuse to deliver up this rogue.”

“I do not know,” said the subadar; “we can but make the demand.”

“And if he is so presumptuous, sit before the place until we get shells and a battering train. In the meantime we have not an hour to lose. Every thing is lost, if intelligence of our movements goes before us.”

They accordingly pushed forward by forced marches, until on the third morning they appeared under the walls, just as day broke, and discovered their white jackets to the sentry upon guard.

Bently found that report had not exaggerated the natural strength of the situation. The fort, like an eagle's nest, was seated upon the table land of a huge mass of rock, which rose perpendicularly above a level sandy plain. Two sides were washed by the stream of two rivers which joined immediately below the rocky peninsula upon which it was situated.

After carefully reconnoitring this strong-hold,

the only possible means of access which could be discovered, were a large pair of folding iron doors in the solid rock. Here then Captain Bently ordered a bugle to be sounded, and a flag of truce to be displayed. The notes of the bugle rang in echoes round the place, and presently a grated wicket in the gate was opened, and a voice from within demanded, "Who comes?"

"An English officer," answered Captain Bently, "on the part of the English Government with a message to their good friend and ally, Rajah Man Sing."

"The Rajah is at present," returned the voice within, "engaged at his morning devotions, and there is no permission to open the gates without his order; but in an hour his answer shall be with the English commander."

At the end of the stipulated hour, the gates were opened, and the Rajah issued forth to meet the messenger of his good friend the Governor General. After the proper compliments on both sides, Captain Bently stated that he had come on the part of Government, to require

that O Meer Sing, a notorious robber, murderer, and disturber of the public peace, should be delivered into his hands.

The Rajah replied with great dignity, that he had always regarded the English Government as his friends, but that he was an independant prince, and at liberty to receive into his fort whom he pleased, particularly if he had not received a request from his friend the Governor General to the contrary; and that whenever he had once opened his gates to any one, he could never perfidiously stain his hands, by giving him up to the power of his pursuers. "I do not say that O Meer Sing is or is not here; but I do say that I never will, and never have come under any engagement to shut my gates in the face of one friend to please another:" he therefore invited Captain Bently, and the troops under his command, to turn in and take what refreshment it afforded.

Captain Bently courteously returned thanks, according to native etiquette, and said, "Before accepting your invitation, Rajah Man Sing, I think it fair to tell you, that my orders are to

seize O Meer Sing wherever I can find him ; I hope therefore that you will not think that I disturb the peace of your dwelling, by doing my duty."

" Captain Bently Sahib is at liberty to do his duty. He has my word that I will neither hinder nor help him. My friends are free to come and go, without my fighting for them. In Hindostan there are too many disputes for a wise man to draw his sword in other men's quarrels."

Under this assurance, which Bently had every reason to confide in, the whole party entered by the iron gates, and ascended a narrow flight of steps cut in the solid rock. The attendants of the Rajah carried flambeaux to light the way, and by this means, after a steep and winding ascent of between three and four hundred steps, they emerged into daylight, and found themselves in an open space within the walls, overhanging the river. The huge iron grating which closed the subterraneous stair by which they had entered was now open, but in times of war it was the custom to keep it strongly

fastened down, with an immense fire, which was never suffered to languish, burning upon it night and day—an effectual barrier to all possibility of access.

Bently examined this formidable entrance, and found that, before the invention of shells, the place must have been impregnable. The ramparts were strongly defended by large brass guns, and the garrison supplied with water from an enormous well, bored through the centre of the solid rock, below the level of the river's bed.

The Rajah enjoyed Captain Bently's expressions of admiration and surprise, on beholding such an astonishing work, and remarked (with a grave and dignified relaxation of muscle, which was still too little to deserve the name of a smile, but perhaps was as near an approach to it as a high caste native who has passed the follies of youth ever permits himself to make in conversation with an equal :) “You see, Sahib, it is not fear that keeps my tulwar in its sheath. I can shut these gates, and bid defiance to the world; but the humble should dwell in the shadow of the powerful,

and I never turn the suppliant from my gate."

Bently praised his wisdom in preferring to let the dove of peace brood in his towers, rather than to feed the vultures.

Without appearing to do it intentionally, Bently left the subadar and a small party, by the iron grating at the entrance of the singular staircase by which they had come into the fort, while he proceeded with the rest to make a survey of the interior. The space enclosed within the walls might be about two English miles in circumference, a considerable extent for such a situation, though not to be compared with Bhurtpore, Guallior, Ratas, Callinger, and others.

The keilladar kept to his word ; neither he nor any of his people obstructed the search which Bently made to discover O Meer Sing. All, except the family apartments belonging to the different residents and branches of the Rajah's family, were open to his inspection ; but his search was fruitless.

Rizia, in her disguise, made the most strenuous exertions to discover him, whom the oftener

he foiled her, the more she hated ; but her knowledge of the place was useless, and Bently was forced to rest satisfied with the conviction, that the Pindarees had again, like a hive of bees, disappeared by some unknown means.

Bently knew the situation in which the Rajah was placed, and, according to native ideas, the wise and honest part he acted. He therefore felt the inutility of applying to him for either information or opinion. He was perfectly aware that keilladars let the shelter of their strong-holds, and provided they keep by their engagements, can do so without impairing their honour, and as long as they do not openly resist the execution of Government orders, can maintain their independance. He therefore accepted the civility he met with in all fair courtesy, and having rested the night in the guest-chamber which the Rajah had appointed for him, on the morrow descended by the way he came, with the intention of recommencing his harassing pursuit. He had left his baggage, when he went into the fort, at the face of the iron gate by which he entered, under the charge

of a proper guard, with directions to watch the exit or entrance of any one who should pass in or out; upon his return they declared that no one had passed out of or into the fort since he entered it.

Rizia, as she had not made any discovery which might lead to the apprehension of O Meer Sing, could not, while in the fort, dare to speak to Captain Bently, for fear of discovering her voice to those who had so often heard it. She knew that her disguise of men's clothes might impose upon him, or his followers, who had never seen her before; but she had less confidence with those who knew her; and it was not until Bently was fairly without the gates, and his friends from the fort had left him, that she proceeded to state all the observations she had made, and her belief that the Pindarees were hid somewhere about the fort, or at least at no great distance from it. She in her search had found the covered doolies, by which part of the gang had entered, and in fruitless investigations discovered that in the place which she knew these men to have inhabited, there

were marks of recent cooking. It was utterly impossible that they could have been admitted into the female apartments. Nothing on earth would induce a native to sanction such a mode of secreting even his own brother. Then where could they be? There were no cellars within the walls. From the first time that she recognised O Meer Sing at the nautch, she had taken special pains to make herself acquainted with all that the fort contained, or any means of concealment which it might afford, and she now examined them all. Could those she sought have been let down in baskets into the river while the Rajah paid his visit to Captain Bently in front of the gate?

CHAPTER X.

Day is the time for toil,
Night balms the weary breast ;
Stars have their vigil, seas awhile
Will sink to peaceful rest :
But round and round the shadow creeps
Of time that slumbers not, nor sleeps.

JOHN MALCOLM.

THE appearance of the party which Bently commanded was no sooner discerned from the ramparts of the fort than all was bustle within the walls. Such an unusual sight produced a corresponding sensation.

“ You have staid a day too long, O Meer Sing,” said the Rajah, “ and will bring yourself and me into trouble. You know our agreement ; when I took your money, I told you that you should remain undisturbed here ; but when the sepoy come, I must open the gates to them.”

“ True, but you will not deliver me into their hands now.”

“ No, my honour stands as fast as this rock under our feet ; but I cannot refuse to let them enter, and take you, without bringing the walls about our ears.”

“ The well !” said O Meer Sing, “ the well !”

“ It is a good thought,” answered the Rajah ; “ but we have lived so peaceably, that it has never been used, and no one but myself is acquainted with it. How did you find it out ?”

“ I never come into a place,” answered O Meer, “ without looking how I can get out. As strangers are coming into the fort, there will not be any women near it, and the men will be upon the ramparts.”

“ Do your act ; remember my agreement is at an end ; time goes on.”

“ Only gain time,” answered O Meer Sing ; “ make your visit long, and all will be well, without trouble to any one.”

The Rajah, to avoid notice, returned to his own people upon the walls, who were anxiously looking out upon the sepoy below.

“Let us fire upon them,” said the heir-apparent. “What right have the Company’s slaves to come and demand admission into our hill forts? Before, we never opened or shut our gates but to whom we pleased.”

“Fool!” answered his father, “your words are greater than your beard! else you would know that they give kingdoms and take them away; their friendship is life, and their anger is death. I have kept this fort while others are in dust and ashes, without doing anything to stain my name. Walk in my steps, and be wise.”

O Meer Sing had secretly collected his people, and getting into the bucket which hung suspended by a strong chain over the well, was quickly lowered down to near a level with the water. He had a torch in one hand, which showed him a hook on the wall; he reached forward his tulwar with the other, caught hold of the hook, and swung himself into a nitch which by a small passage opened into a large vaulted chamber, originally constructed as a place of security for treasure, or escape in case of the fort falling into an enemy’s hands. O Meer,

as soon as he was safely landed, twitched the chain and the bucket, which were drawn up. In this way the whole of the gang descended one after another, except the last, who, not having been in the skirmish in the jungle, was confident that he might remain with impunity, and, as we have already seen, contrived to evade even the sharp eyes of the revengeful Rizia.

A long arched passage led in the direction of the fort gate: leaving the torch with his followers, O Meer crept in perfect darkness to the further end, where he could distinctly hear all that passed at the gate. Some very small perforations had been made for the express purpose of enabling those within to hear all that might be said by those without, and putting his ear to the place, as the echo of approaching footsteps warned him that the pursuing party were descending, he heard Bently make some observation upon the strength of the gates as he passed out. He was followed by his whole party; then a native voice, in a half whisper, said, "You have deceived us, and brought us here for nothing."

"No," was the answer, in tones that he could never forget, and his eye flashed fire as he heard them, though he remained as still as if he was carved in stone, while his ear drunk in what followed: "I told you truth; and if you stay here and watch to-night, perhaps before the morning light he may yet be in your hands."

The speakers passed out, and the gate creaked upon its hinges; O Meer then groped his way back as he had come, and recounted to Byram all that he had just heard. "That nautch woman," he said, "has sold and betrayed us."

"How could she know you," demanded the lieutenant, "or any thing of our being here?"

"Good reason has she to know me." O Meer then recounted the history of Ali Cawn, though it was not much his custom to speak of his own exploits to any one who had not witnessed them.

"If that is the case," answered the auditor, "and they set down here to watch the fort, we shall die here of starvation, like foxes whose earths have been stopped."

"It is possible that there is some way of get-

ting out near the gate. If our light would not betray us, in the heat of the day, when the guards are asleep—I shall try.”

The place in which they were, though dark as chaos, was not altogether without air, which descending by the well was circulated through the passages, and drawn into the small perforations by the suction of the great staircase. As soon as they had closed their eyes in forgetfulness, O Meer took his torch, and having just stopped the small apertures with rags, which he tore off the end of his sash, proceeded to examine the place, feeling every inch of the rock with his hands. At length he discovered a moveable stone, and making a sign to Byram, who held the torch, to stand back, he removed it, and found an aperture long enough to admit a man's body. A glance through the hole showed him what he had to do; therefore, replacing it carefully, he brought the whole of his gang with unshod feet and noiseless steps to the spot, and pointed out to them his happy discovery. Then all retreating to a proper distance, a general consultation was held upon the safest means of escape.

Ram Chund proposed that he should go out by the newly-discovered opening, and take his stand behind the gate in the dark, and wait until sunset, when the young Rajah, as was his custom, would certainly come out with so many followers that he could easily pass amongst them; thus he would find means to cross the river, and lead the English sahib to eat the air, as he had done before.

The plan met with general approbation, and was forthwith carried into execution. Bently's arrival at the fort and search for O Meer Sing, had discovered the secret of the covered doolies to all the residents within the walls; but these were the Rajah's family and dependants, consequently bound neither to see nor hear what he chose should remain unknown; or if there were any amongst them disposed to make his own profit of this discovery, the sudden and unaccountable disappearance of the Pindarees put it out of their power. Bently, instead of pursuing his march, as was his first intention, had, in consequence of Rizia's information, determined to keep his ground and place a strict watch

round the fort. Two hours before sunset the young Rajah and his train issued forth, and having passed the encampment, were soon hid from their sight by the jungle. There Ram Chund took the opportunity to drop behind the train, who, without bestowing a thought upon him passed on. He then made straight for the river, where, finding a fisherman's dingy, he cut the rope, jumped in, and without interruption or obstruction, paddled to the opposite side. He lost not a moment in repairing to the spot where Ally Buxus and the other horses were concealed, and giving his comrades the necessary directions, he mounted the good black steed, and rode down the bank until he came in a line with the fort, taking care, however, to keep under cover so as not to be seen. When he judged himself in a proper situation, he gave the bridle to one of his comrades, who acted as sice, and dismounting, he kept through the bushes until he reached the water's edge; then, knowing that he was near enough to be seen by the sepoy on the opposite bank, though sufficiently distant to be out of the reach of their shot, he stood for

a moment on his feet, until he was certain that he had attracted the attention of those upon the watch, then, as if anxious to escape their notice, he slipped away among the bushes, and making a sign to the man who had the horse he brought him forward to a spot full in sight. He found from the instant movement amongst the opposite party, that his trick had succeeded, and following a contrary direction to that his leader meant to take, he was out of sight in an instant, and as soon as the river could be crossed, the pursuing party were upon his traces.

By this means O Meer Sing found the coast clear, and as soon as darkness concealed his movements from those on the ramparts, effected his escape; the Rajah having himself remained at the gate, and sent away his people on different pretexts, when O Meer Sing and his gang emerged from their cheerless concealment, where they had remained two whole days with no other nourishment than the small quantity of parched grain which each always carried in a little bag, concealed in the folds of his sash. At parting the Rajah warned him of the utter impossibility

of his ever again receiving him into his fort without the certainty of his displeasing Government, a risk he was resolved never to encounter. Before the proclamation had reached him he had a right to do so; now it was impossible.

The Pindarees thus found their customary places of refuge one after another shut against them, and their movements every day became more difficult. Under cover of the night they seized upon some fishermen's boats, and crossed to the other side, when they made their way to the deserted temples in the jungle. O Meer Sing waited with great anxiety for the return of his trusty friend Ally Buxus, and it was not until after midnight that Ram Chund made his appearance with the gallant horse, whose jetty hide was dappled over with white foam. O Meer kissed the face of the faithful animal, who, sensible of his master's kindness, stretched out his nose upon his shoulder, to receive the caresses which the other lavished upon him. "You have run well, my heart," said O Meer, as he rubbed down his smoking sides. "Yes," answered Ram Chund, "we kept the road before them until

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they were far enough from Ravelghur, and then, making a turn which they know nothing of, came here."

"After such a night's walk," said O Meer Sing, "they must sit on their ground to-morrow, as we must do on ours. I, Byram, and the other horsemen, will keep well to the right, and get on before them. The rest, who have no horses, must divide into small parties, and buy them where they can, and meet me on the Plain, where, perhaps, we may do some work, to pay us for our loss in the jungle, and with the whole troop dash off to our own homes. Ally Buxus would like to rest after his long travel," he said, patting his thin flank, and carefully washing his unshod feet; "he has run fast and far, and deserves better meat than I have been able to give him lately."

In the general movement occasioned amongst Captain Bently's party by Ram Chund's *ruse de guerre* (which deceived them into the opinion that it was O Meer Sing who had crossed the river and fled before them), Rizia mounted her horse, and left them. She knew that if he was

again at liberty there was no chance of her reward, and she had her own private reasons for wishing to part company before questions should be asked which she might find difficulty in answering. She had no wish that the sepoys should go farther northward, even in the search of one whom she hated with two-fold hatred. If he went that way, she hoped to secure her vengeance without their assistance, and their presence would be more injurious to her interests in other respects than money could compensate.

At Delhi, Captain Bently was again obliged to halt for information, and some time elapsed before he received certain intelligence that O Meer Sing had taken the way to Hurdhaw. Bently knew that, if it was so, the great annual fair held in the commencement of the cold weather must be his object, and therefore determined not to harass the men under his command by farther movement until the weather should be more favourable. Hitherto he had been extremely fortunate: notwithstanding the weather, fatigue, and exposure to which they had been subjected, he had not lost a man, ex-

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cept those killed in the jungle; but the breaking up of the rains was always an unhealthy season, and he resolved, if not called upon by some exploit of the Pindarees, to keep them quiet during that time, and as soon as the weather permitted carry them forward by easy marches. The death of Major Melville had been to him a cause of deep regret; and he felt for Mrs. Melville as he would have done for his own sister. On board the Cumberland he saw the first traces of the tenderness and resolution of mind which she had since displayed in no ordinary degree. She was the friend of his Elizabeth and of Charlotte Percy, which, had she been less esteemed by him on her own account than she really was, would have given her a strong claim upon his affection. Soon after his arrival at Delhi, he had great pleasure in hearing, by a letter from Colonel Howard, that Mrs. Melville had given birth to a little boy, who occupied so much of her time and affection that they all looked upon the circumstance as a blessing from God. Her health, though partly re-established, had suffered so much from the

time of Melville's death, that Colonel Howard expressed great anxiety about it. "I have spoken to her," he continued, "upon the subject, and she is so wishful to nurse her little Edward that she is quite ready to follow our advice; and, as I can at present leave the station without difficulty, I have proposed to her that we shall go and pay a visit to Elizabeth, in her solitude at Cawnpore. You may therefore expect our next letters from your own house. Do not neglect to write by every opportunity, for since Fortescue has left the station Elizabeth has no means of hearing of your movements but from your own letters."

On reading this, a plan suggested itself to Bently which he trusted would meet the wishes of all parties. The Hurdwaw fair, to which he was going, had always been reckoned one of the most curious sights in India, and was held upon a fine healthy open plain on the banks of the Ganges. Elizabeth and Charlotte could never have such another opportunity of seeing it, and he was certain the complete change of air would be of great service to Flora. He therefore wrote

to both Colonel Howard and Elizabeth, proposing this new arrangement. He well knew that it would fall in with the wishes of the latter; and he trusted to her eloquence to make it agreeable to the rest of the party. By return of dawn he had the satisfaction to receive the welcome assurance that his proposal was agreed to by every one concerned in it. Elizabeth had heard it with rapture; Charlotte and her uncle with pleasure; and Mrs. Melville made no objection to what was so much the wish of all her friends. She thought, perhaps, it would be for the advantage of her little darling, who promised, in her partial eyes, to be the exact representative of his father, and therefore entitled to every exertion she could make for him.

It was resolved they should go up the Jumna to Delhi, and Colonel Howard took care to secure comfortable boats, and every suitable accommodation. He also provided himself with a set of tents to be pitched when they reached the place of their destination. Travellers in India, whether by land or water, (unless, indeed, they should be under the necessity of travelling dawn,

must have their servants and stores with them. The domestics belonging to the three families were therefore embarked, with palanquins, tonjons, &c. and the little fleet got under weigh.

Poor Flora had come dawk to Benares, and the only journey she had made afterwards was in the same way. This was therefore new, and had the advantage of being unconnected in her mind with any painful associations. She had set herself to the discharge of her duties, and sought, by every reason in her power, to strengthen her mind for the fulfilment of what was required of her. The world indeed had changed its hue. The enchantment was broken, and she saw the scenes of life in their meagre and naked reality, but she looked beyond them, and there found rest for her worn spirit.

While she was watching her infant, who slept on her knee, tears one after another, rolled down her pale face; Charlotte, whose heart bled for her, tried by some remark to turn the current of her thoughts.

"It is impossible, Charlotte," she said, "that I can make you understand my thoughts, for I

do not clearly understand them myself. I can say with truth, that since the hour *he* was taken from me, I have never wished to have him back again. No, not even when this babe first met my sight. If a wish of mine could recal him from the seats of bliss back to this sinful and suffering world, I would not utter it; and yet my heart is sometimes so oppressed with pity for myself, that I look around and around in wonder." "Dearest Flora, though God requires submission to His holy will, He has not forbidden us to sorrow, but he has commanded that it shall not be 'as those who have no hope.'"

"When I think of *him*," said Flora, "and what he now is, my mind rests. But when my thoughts fall back upon myself, and what I have become, my mind is like the sea, when it cannot rest. Yet will I trust in Him, who 'will not bruise the broken reed or quench the smoking flax.' I have written to my dear and kind aunt to tell her of this new voyage, which will, I am certain, give her pleasure; she will excuse my inability to return to Calcutta at present." "She will be much occupied," said Charlotte, making

an effort; "Miss Fortescue has been with her for some time, and, I suppose, is now making preparation to leave her."

"It is true," answered Mrs. Melville, and the conversation dropped.

Fortescue had, upon the first arrival of his cousin at the gardens, received several letters from Mrs. Dundas, who spoke of her young guest in terms of the warmest commendation. Lately these letters had ceased, he fancied, in consequence of the daily expectation of his personal appearance in Calcutta, for one delay after another had occurred to detain him after the time first fixed for his departure. After his successor had arrived at Cawnpore he was obliged to go to Agra on some business relative to the affairs of the late Mr. Marriot; and there he had been detained until Colonel Howard's little fleet had sailed from the former station. On his return he found several letters had arrived during his absence; one, a very large packet, in the hand-writing of Miss Fortescue. He hastily broke the seal, and read as follows:

“ My dear Cousin,

“ I hardly know how to address you, or how to open to you the subject of my present letter ; and yet I only, painful as the task may be, should perform it. You will think me so capricious, so ungrateful, so undutiful to the wishes of my dear father, that I fear to lose the esteem with which you have always regarded me ; and, selfish as I am, I fear to wound you still more deeply. But if you think me unworthy, you will feel the less in hearing what must be told. I have given my heart to another ; and, after many a severe, but fruitless struggle, I have also resolved to give my hand !

“ After for years giving you such different hopes, after leaving England with the consent of all my friends to fulfil them, I can hardly bring myself to write this confession ; and yet, if you could know all, I think you would not blame me. I was a child when my father made this engagement, and from that time until the present we have never met. My friends considered me as your affianced wife, and until now I never knew that there was a different affection in the

world to what I felt for you. But I had better lay a plain statement of the circumstances before you.

“When we arrived at Madras, I was, as you already know, kindly received into the family of Mr. and Mrs. Montague, on Chaultry Plain. The only other visitor was a gentleman just arrived from Bengal, and who was intimately acquainted with you, and had seen you before he left Calcutta. This, you may believe, produced an intimacy which was not disagreeable to either. Living in the same family, and meeting Sir Robert Marshall every hour, I soon came to consider him as a friend; and knowing the circumstances of my engagement he made no other pretension. He was recalled to Bengal sooner than he first thought of, and took his passage in our ship. Our voyage up the Bay was long, and before we arrived in Calcutta, I fancied he would have been well pleased had it been still longer. Sensible of this, I felt happy to escape from society, which I now began to find was not very compatible with my engagement. Mrs. Dundas and her excellent husband received me with the

greatest kindness, and spoke of you with the warmest affection. Sir Robert Marshall was so much occupied after his return, that for some time we saw little of him.

The first of Mrs. Dundas' friends who paid me a visit was Mrs. Russell, whom you also know; she treated me with distinguished kindness, and we soon became so intimate, and she pressed me so earnestly to spend a week with her in town, that Mrs. Dundas agreed to my accepting the invitation. At her house I met Sir Robert every day, and, why dissemble? soon began to wish that I was free to receive the unceasing attention he paid me!

“Mr. Russell had for some time been complaining a little, though he was not really ill, and Dr. Dundas urged him to try the effect of change of air, and pass a fortnight with us at the gardens. Mrs. Russell joined in the request, and at the end of my week's visit in Calcutta we all returned together to the gardens. Sir Robert Marshall was unceasing in his attentions to Mr. Russell, and soon became as much domesticated at Dr. Dundas', as he had been at Chou-

ringhee. I strove to shun his society, but your coming was delayed, and Mr. Russell, found so much benefit from his new residence, that he was easily persuaded to lengthen it. Sir Robert Marshall took an opportunity to declare his sentiments. I told him of my engagement; the terms of my father's will; of all that my confusion permitted me to recollect. He represented to me that my breach of promise, or faith if I could call it so, was entirely different in my circumstances to what it would have been had we met since childhood, or had I been of age to choose for myself when I entered into it. That it was impossible, strangers as we were to each other, that you could ever feel the misery, on giving up the engagement, which he should do, if I persisted in keeping it; that my father's fortune was not worthy of a second thought; that he had enough of his own, and that it was myself only that he sought.

“ Judge, if I ought not to be sensible of such generosity; but, deeply as I felt it, I did not give my consent, until I reflected that keeping my engagement with you, when my affections

were bestowed upon another, would be adding to my trespass against you.

“Having come to a determination, I could not permit you to learn it from any other person. Situated as I am I have acted for myself. I have not consulted even Mrs. Dundas in the steps I have taken; judging, as your friend, it would place her in a disagreeable situation, and preferring to bear the responsibility of my own faults without involving another : self confidence and inexperience led me into the first error, but I will not increase it by dissembling. Try to view my conduct, reprehensible as it has been, with your usual candour. My dear father only intended to secure my happiness, but I will not attempt to justify myself. Hart Hall is yours. May you long enjoy it with one more worthy, and think with regard of

Your always affectionate cousin,

SOPHIA FORTESCUE.”

It is easy to imagine the feelings with which Fortescue perused this letter. “Yes, Charlotte, the time is come when I may, without a

crime, say how much I have loved you. Dear and excellent cousin, what a reproach is your candour to me; and Marshall's generosity shall not go unrewarded. My sweet cousin ought not for a moment to have thought that I could take advantage of her father's partiality to rob her of her rightful inheritance."

His first thought was to order dawk bearers, and proceed instantly to Delhi; his next was, to answer this delightful letter. Circumstanced as he was, it was impossible that he should have made the confession which she had done; but now he could absolve her mind from the distress she felt on his account, and reinstate her in her own good opinion. By confessing himself the first aggressor in the matter of the will, he could the more easily induce her and Sir Robert Marshall to retain possession of Hart Hall. With this intention, he instantly wrote a long letter to his amiable cousin, in which he entirely approved of her conduct, and expressed his wishes for her happiness, and that of his friend Marshall, who he believed had preferred his own suit in the knowledge of his (Fortescue's)

feelings, and had yet honourably refrained from throwing that weight into the balance, when he perceived it turning in his favour. He could not help thinking that his other Calcutta friends, by their passive behaviour, had also entertained ideas of the same kind; and, following the example Miss Fortescue had set him, he gave her a connected detail of every circumstance in his intercourse with Miss Percy, from their first meeting at the Cape until the present time, taking care, however, to confine his relation to his own feelings, as he did not yet find himself at liberty to speak of Miss Percy's. When the letter was finished, he sealed and instantly addressed it, and it was not until then that he observed several others on the table. One was from Mr. Panton, who with his new bride was passing up the river to his station, and he wrote to offer Mr. Fortescue a visit for a few days, as he wished to settle with him and Colonel Howard relative to the property of the deceased Mrs. Marriot.

Hateful as such a visit would have been at any time, it was doubly so at the present, and

nothing but necessity could have induced him to receive them. He held money in his hands which now belonged to Mr. Panton, and knew that Colonel Howard as well as himself would be glad to have a final release. Thus being rescued from the necessity of going to Calcutta, and detained at the station against his inclination, he occupied his time in effecting an appointment at Benares.

Colonel Howard had in the mean time conducted his party in safety to Delhi, where Bently received them with delight. Every arrangement was now made for the march of the troops under his command, and Colonel Howard proposed that they should all continue their route together by land, and send on the baggage-boats as far as it was possible for them to go, and that every thing not required upon the march should be in readiness upon the ground when they came up. Bently had already provided himself with a riding elephant, and Colonel Howard purchased two more for himself, Charlotte, and Mrs. Melville. The ayahs were accommodated with the back seat in the howdahs, by the chattah

bearers, and as they only mounted from day-break until about eight in the morning, and found their breakfast tent and servants (who were always sent on the night before) ready upon the ground, the excursion might be regarded as a jaunt of pleasure. The crowd of travellers they saw on their road, showed what the fair was expected to be. When they drew near Hurdwaw, Captain Bently thought it prudent to push on by double marches, as he did not wish the news of his arrival to outrun his actual presence. Mrs. Bently he left to take her place by Mrs. Melville, and follow more at leisure.

CHAPTER XI.

————— As bees
 In spring time, when the Sun with Taurus rides,
 Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
 In clusters—————
 —————So thick the crowd
 Swarm'd and were streightened, till, the signal given,
 Behold a wonder !

PARADISE LOST.

WHEN Bently arrived at the end of his journey, he saw before him, bounded by the hills, an immense plain, on which were congregated all the nations of Asia. The splendid pavilions of rajahs, nawabs, and native princes of every degree, in the centre of their numerous followers, stretched out in long perspective ; their riding and carriage cattle, picketed around them, gave their encampments the appearance of hostile powers drawn up in opposition to each other. Arabs, Turks, Persians, Jews, Afghans, Mah-rattahs, Hindoos, Cashmerians, and Armenians,

all kept their separate places, surrounded by their own castes and kindreds ; while merchants of every country and craft erected their booths and displayed their wares. Here were the shawls of Cashmere and the silks of China, the tissues of Benares, and the gems of Golconda, gums, spices, perfumes, native shoes, richly embroidered, and highly wrought hookah apparatus, horses of Arabia, Persia, Turkestaun, and Cabul, gigantic bullocks from Guzzerat, cows from Huriana, camels, and elephants, with tumblers, jugglers, nautch dancers, and itinerant musicians innumerable. The great midahn * was literally covered with a concourse, whom no man could number, and the royal Ganges was equally crowded with boats and craft of every description, from the most magnificent pleasure-boats to the cockle-shell dingy, which held one poor fisherman. Comers from among all the dwellers of the East had met on neutral ground to exchange their mutual wants, and the air rung to the neigh of horses, the shouts of the

* Plain.

multitude, the tread of many feet, and the discordant clangour of musical instruments. Here mountebanks and tumblers played their tricks, and the mob rent the air with acclamations. There elephants roared, restive horses and camels kicked and bit, and sices and sirwans,* as cross grained as the brutes they tended, gave gallee,† and swore in horrid concert.

It had been agreed between Captain Bently and Colonel Howard that, as it was possible the former might have some disagreeable duty to perform, the two encampments should be pitched at a little distance from each other; and Bently accordingly sent sentries to secure the ground he had fixed upon for his friends until they should come up. This ground had, upon his arrival, been occupied by a party of horsemen who seemed, from the variety of cattle they possessed, to be itinerant horse-dealers. Their animals were, for the most part, low caste country horses, jungle tazees, latoos, and every spe-

* Camel drivers.

† Abuse.

cies of cross grained, cross made beast, which ever degraded the name of horse.

Bently was well pleased, as soon as he had pitched his tents, though their ground was not quite close to his, that they thought proper to move to a greater distance. Perhaps they dreaded the sepoy's interfering in their bargains; and, on his part, as their customers were likely to be of the lower orders, and their business would probably not be settled without some squabble, he should be rid of their noise.

Two little boys of their party seemed to be perfectly delighted to see his servants pitch his tents, and asked a thousand innocent questions about the road they had travelled, and the amusement they expected at the fair. The subadar had, during the last day's march, lost the wretched animal upon which he rode, who, worn out by fatigue, dropped down dead under him. As soon therefore as his tents were pitched, he hastened to the horse-dealers, who were in the act of striking theirs; as his attention, in passing them, had been attracted by a white horse, which was just the sort of creature he wanted. He did

not find the price set upon this animal dear, in comparison to what was demanded for some of the others. The merchant also seemed anxious to decrease his stock, so that a bargain was soon concluded, and the subadar, charmed with his new purchase, returned in triumph to show off his paces, above all, his remarkably easy amble.

“Here,” said Captain Bently, as the subadar entered his tent, after having put up his steed, “I think we shall have difficulty in finding him of whom we come in search; none of our men had a sufficiently distinct view of him in the jungle to recognise his person in another dress, and there are so many black Mahratta horses on the ground, that I do not think we shall find him out by that mark.”

“We must watch well,” said the subadar; “three days after this is our great Hindoo festival, when, under planetary influence, every body must bathe in the Ganges, and our men, who keep the barriers at the ghauts, may get some news.”

The subadar found that his old saddle would not fit his new purchase, and therefore in the

evening took the opportunity to make the tour of the booths, and look for another. He ordered his servants to lead his horse after him, that he might be able to fit him to his mind; and after stopping at several places, where the saddles did not suit, or were too dear, he came to a dealer in second hand goods, and amongst the number found one well padded and covered with crimson velvet which he thought would answer. Making a sign for the sice, who had difficulty in forcing his way through the crowd, he waited until he came up, and then clapped on the horse the new housing, which had struck his fancy. The merchant started, no doubt at the suddenness of the action.

The subadar remarked, that it was a strange thing, that there should be the very same mark upon the inner flap of the saddle, which he had found on his horse's back. The dealer answered with composure, "Then it is your fate to buy of me, for all my saddles have that mark." The price was soon settled, and the subadar, thus equipped, mounted and continued his way. Waiting to let a crowd disperse before he could

proceed, a party of handsomely dressed horsemen passed; the foremost regarded him and his horse with a very peculiar look. He rode a grey Arab, and wore a richly chased tulwar, suspended by a gold chain, from his cummerbund, and the subadar, seeing he was a Hindoo of high caste, probably a burrow bahader,* from his train, made his salaams, which the other returned with the dignified courtesy of a superior to an inferior, and rode on.

Next evening Colonel Howard and the ladies arrived, and took up the ground which Bently had reserved for them. People from the boats were all ready before them, and all was prepared for their comfortable reception.

“ I shall be afraid, Colonel Howard,” said Mrs. Melville, “ to let my little boy go out in this multitude, and yet, if I keep him within, he will suffer from the want of the air and exercise, which have done him so much good.”

“ No, my dear Mrs. Melville, we must not suffer him to lose the roses he has picked up on

* Great Lord.

the road. One of Bently's orderlies, will go with his ayah's tonjou, and two of my chokey-dars, and they can keep the open path."

Mrs. Melville agreed, only charging the ayah not to go near the fair. However, the latter, thinking it too good an opportunity to be lost, resolved to amuse herself with a sight of the booths, smoothing the matter to herself with the idea, that at day-break there would not be the least danger or difficulty. However she was undeceived when the sudden turn of a hackery forced her so tight up against some bales of heavy goods, that the tonjou was in danger of being crushed to pieces.

The orderly laid his rattan over the shoulders of the bullock driver, and a native sprung forward, who took the infant from the arms of the terrified ayah, who was screaming at the pitch of her voice, "O hum marrah baba! hum marrah baba!" *

The man held the little creature until danger was passed; it smiled in his face, he kissed it,

* My child.

with the fondness of natives for children, "A very beautiful baba," and inquired, "What gentleman's child?"

"Major Melville Sahib's," answered the ayah.

He regarded it more attentively, placed it in the ayah's arms, telling her that she had better return, and not run any more risks. "It would be a loss to hurt such a sweet baba."

"Yes, yes," said the ayah, looking at him full in the face, "and you had better go home too; the air of this place is not good for you."

He left them; the bearers took no notice of a dialogue, which passed to them for the ayah's pert desire to answer the well meant advice she had received.

"Do you know that man?" she demanded of those about her.

"No. How should we? we never were here before. Do you?"

"It does not signify," she answered; "that is not your business."

When Colonel Howard had the detail of this occurrence from the orderly, he resolved to conceal it from Mrs. Melville; but at the same

time threatened the ayah with instant discharge, if ever such a thing happened again.

While they were at breakfast, the subadar rode up to the tent door and alighted to make his salaams to Colonel Howard; one of the servants who was coming in at an opposite door, with a plate of rolls, no sooner cast his eyes upon the horse, than, uttering an expression of terror and wonder, he dropped them on the ground, crying, "Wah! Wah! my master's horse!"

"What horse—what master—what do you talk of?" demanded the Colonel.

"I was Ali Cawn's servant, before I engaged myself to you, Sahib, at Delhi; he rode that horse the night he was murdered. I know him well."

"There are hundreds of horses of that colour," answered the Colonel.

"Yes, but I would know him among them all; he has a mark on his left side under the saddle, and will come when I call him."

The subadar had hitherto listened in silence; he now interposed. "Your servant may be

right, Sahib. I bought him yesterday, and when I call to mind all that passed, I wonder I did not guess something was wrong. He has the mark on his side, but the same is on the saddle, though I bought them at different places."

The servant had by this time gone up to the horse, who instantly seemed to recognise his voice, and pricked his ears at hearing the name by which he addressed him. "And my master's saddle too, only his silver stirrups are changed."

The subadar went into a detail of all the circumstances of both his purchases.

"And this," he said, "was a reason why the horse-dealers ran away from this very spot when we came upon it. Perhaps they are run away altogether."

"It is plain that they are in more companies than one," returned the Colonel, "and you had better ride round the place this day on that horse. Perhaps his appearance will help you to something, and try to discover them."

"I recollect," observed the subadar, "that some great men looked very much at me and my horse, last night. Who could they be?"

“What was their dress and appearance?” asked Colonel Howard.

The subadar described both.

“I saw that picture,” said the Colonel, aside, and in an under voice, “in a letter from Lucknow.”

“Wah! wah! Sahib, and I made my salaam to him! It is a great loss, that a Hindoo of his caste and appearance, should take to such work.”

Colonel Howard and the subadar, walked out of the tent, and consulted on what was to be done. After the latter was gone, the Colonel called Ali Cawn's servant, and desired that he would go through the fair with the appearance of making a small purchase, and try to find out if there were any other things belonging to his master offered for sale. “It behoves us to seize the whole at one moment; else if we take one, the rest will fly.”

Bently now entered to hear another rehearsal of all their discoveries, and to add his own. “As I was passing,” he said, “through a crowded part of the bazaar, a restive camel kicked out behind, and struck a covered hackery

I heard within a voice which sounded familiar to my ears, and presently saw the face of the beautiful nautch girl, who came to inform me of O Meer Sing's residence at Ravelghur. Her dress was entirely different, and the instant she recognized me, she drew back her head, and shut the curtains, as if unwilling to be seen. In these circumstances nothing was to be done, but I ordered my sice, a clever intelligent fellow, to follow the hackery, observe where it stopped and who got out of it; and I hope we shall be able to gather something from him. To-morrow is the great day on the river, and I shall be there in person."

The ladies had left the breakfast tent, before Bently's entry, and he and the Colonel continued to settle their plans of operation, for the next day. While they were yet speaking, the sice returned, and told his master that he had followed the hackery according to his orders, until it stopped with a company of country horse-dealers, when a woman and two little boys got out.

"There is another link," said Bently; "those

two children were in my tent the day of my arrival, and it is evident they and my informer are connected with the wretches who murdered Ali Cawn near Secundra."

"A regular organized phansygar troop," said the Colonel; "we shall know their precise number when your subadar and my servant return from their reconnoitring excursion; and I shall detach parties to seize them, when I go to the river to-morrow. The crowd on the plain will be less, and it can be effected with greater ease. Every man's hand will be against them, for their hand is against every man."

O Meer Sing had laid a plan for intercepting a party of rich Jew merchants upon their return from the fair. To forward its execution, his presence was necessary, particularly to ascertain their movements; and he was of opinion, that a high character disguise was less likely to subject him to scrutiny, and observation than a low one. He therefore, as soon as he came upon the field, had provided himself with tents, and horses for his dismounted followers. Several

more of his troop had joined him on his route ; and since he was neither horse-dealer nor merchant, his appearing as an independent gentleman would be less suspicious in the eyes of strangers, and more likely to blind those who might be in pursuit of him, if any such there were. He had heard of Captain Bently's encampment at Delhi, and believed he had given up the intention of following farther. The apparition of the subadar on Ali Cawn's white horse had undeceived him. However he was confident that there was none of the party under Bently's command acquainted with his person ; and all might yet be quiet. In this idea he was again unsettled, for on his return to his place, he observed the phansygar boy, Jumman, creep from the tent where he had kept Ally Buxus closely concealed from every eye. The boy ran away at sight of him, but it was almost impossible that he should suppose the poor sice in the serai, and the jewelled Sahib, who now stood before him, to be one and the same man. Still O Meer was not certain, and next morning, putting on the dress of a common native and throwing his chudder

over his head to keep off the sun, he sallied forth to ascertain if possible who of the phan-sygars might be at the fair, and what danger he ran.

It was in this tour he met the ayah and Melville's child. She knew him, but it was plain at the same time that she did not wish others to do so; for she had given him a prudent hint. After a long walk, which happened to be in a different direction to those he sought, he returned without satisfaction; for he was not apprised that they came as horse merchants, and even had he possessed that knowledge, they had nothing since the sale of Ali Cawn's horse to distinguish them from fifty of the same profession. The boys, though they went about with strangers, did not show themselves with their own troop.

"What do you think, Byram?" asked O Meer Sing, after recounting these circumstances to his Lieutenant.

"That we need not give ourselves trouble about them, only keep quiet, and we are safe. We have black tents of Cabul on one hand, and a Mahratta chief on the other; a Rajah be-

fore us, and another behind, so that in such good company no one will think of looking for us. The boy came by chance; jackalls cannot keep from skulking; to-morrow is the great day."

"You are not going to the river, Byram?"

"When shall I have such an opportunity again? I made a vow in the fort, that if we got safe out, I would wash on that day in the waters of the Ganges."

"Vows must be kept, but I shall take care that your horse is not far off."

"You will find me, if fortune goes against me, at the east corner of the large temple."

We shall now leave O Meer Sing and his troop quiet on their own ground, while we hear what tidings Captain Bently and Colonel Howard received by the return of their emissaries. The subadar had not heard any news of O Meer Sing, but he had ascertained the exact number of the horse-dealers, and found that a havildar and sixteen men would be sufficient to take them into custody. Two other small parties would secure the vender of old saddles,

and a suspicious armourer; amongst whose goods the servant had discovered the tulwar of Ali Cawn.

For these services Bently thought it prudent to require a reinforcement from a detachment of the Company's troops quartered upon the opposite side of the plain, three or four miles distant, and proposed taking Elizabeth with him in the howdah.

"I shall also endeavour to persuade Mrs. Melville to go out with me," said the Colonel; "what has happened this morning shows how unsafe it is to let her infant go out with the servants; and Charlotte will be housekeeper."

This plan settled, the elephants were made ready, and the party set forth; the plea of her child's advantage was at all times sufficient, and, however against her own inclination, Mrs. Melville's consent was obtained.

They had not been gone half an hour, when a palanquin, carried by dawk bearers, ran up to the sitting tent, where Charlotte was reading alone, and in the next instant Fortescue was before her.

But why repeat a twice told tale? Fortescue had poured every circumstance of his release into the ear of his willing auditor, in less time than the most expert writer could require to commit them to paper; and heard from her own lips, a confirmation of the confession she had before made on the river. She perused the candid and generous letter of Miss Fortescue with tears of delight; and as she returned it with a smile, observed; "It will not be easy to atone for the loss of such a writer."

Charlotte had made the remark in the sincere conviction of her heart, not to draw out the professions which followed it, though perhaps they were not the less agreeable to her ear. Time flew unheeded until the return of Colonel Howard's elephant showed that the sun had given place to the moon. Charlotte ran out to receive Flora's sweet babe from the hands of its mother, as the noble animal kneeled down for his riders to dismount. Fortescue followed, and Colonel Howard received him with the greatest cordiality. Flora thought he never seemed so animated as when he kissed her dear boy, and left

a tear on his innocent face. He carried the infant, and giving his arm to its mother, who took it in silence, conducted her to the door of her tent. Charlotte entered with her, and above the littleness of concealment with the friend she loved, communicated to her all that had passed.

Flora heard her to the end, and when she had finished speaking, took her by the hand, and said solemnly, "May you be blessed, Charlotte!" kissed her forehead, and retired to the inner apartment.

Charlotte knew and respected the feelings of her friend; she therefore left her for a time, and went to join her sister, who heard all that had passed with unbounded delight. "May you," she said, "be as happy as I am, dear Charlotte!" while she folded her sister to her bosom.

Fortescue had received the affectionate congratulations of both Colonel Howard and his friend Bently, before dinner was announced, and the two sisters went in search of Mrs. Melville: she had sought composure where alone it is to be found, and nerved her mind to take part

in her friend's enjoyment, without clouding it by her own retrospections.

The evening passed as such an evening might be expected to pass; and silence had sunk over the hushed multitude, whose white tents glittered beneath the "wan, unwarming beam," before they separated for the night.

Fortescue returned with Captain Bently to his encampment. Here all was quiet. The men knowing the hour on which they were to be on duty in the morning, had long since retired to rest.

Julall, who slept across the door of his master's tent, started up as they entered, and with profound salaams to Fortescue, inquired, "If the sahib had been well since they parted on the river?"

"Very well, Julall; and does not forget what passed then."

The bearer made a gratified salaam.

Bently gave his cot to his friend, and threw himself upon his couch for an hour, which was all the time he could permit himself to rest, be-

fore he should be again on foot. At the appointed moment the sepoy's marched on the different services which had been assigned to each party; guards were stationed at all the ghauts, and Captain Bently took care to secure a well-manned boat to be in waiting for himself in case it was necessary.

Those only accustomed to witness the efforts of Hindoo zeal, and who know what population it can call to view, can imagine the concourse of that morning. Thousands, and tens of thousands, crowded the ghauts, waiting for the troubling of the waters. The hum of the assembled multitude rose through the calm air; too anxious to speak, and too impatient to be still. Day dawned. The Brahmins gave the signal; the barriers were withdrawn, and the blind multitude rushed forward by sudden and irresistible impulse, which gained strength as it extended from those nearest to the water to those the most distant. What was to be expected happened. The foremost ranks were thrown down. Those behind pressed forward, and trampled under foot the miserable sufferers. Every mo-

ment augmented their number by the increasing violence of the obstructed multitude, until the ghauts actually became choked with a living mass of human bodies, writhing in agony, and rending the air with shrieks for help, which were utterly unheeded by the blind devotees, who still poured over them. The efforts of the guards were useless; nothing but a general fire from their muskets could have staid the mad zeal which spread through the mob.*

Bently called his men, and the police chokeydars, who, with drawn tulwars and fixed bayonets, had orders to force a passage through the crowd, and form a line across the top of the ghauts, while he, with the assistance of several European gentlemen, who had come to witness this extraordinary scene, pressed numbers of boats into their service, and repaired to the front of the ghauts. Here a new obstruction occurred. Those who had gained the water were bathing, and performing their ceremonies, with as much unconcern as they could have tes-

* This dreadful accident really happened about fifteen years ago.

tified in any ordinary circumstances, and it was not until Bently, and the commanders of the other boats, had by forcible means dispersed them, that they could make their way to the sufferers. Many were already dead. The limbs and lower extremities of others were in the last stage of putrification, extraordinary as it may appear, that such a dreadful change should take place in so short a time. Pressure and heat had however effected this shocking catastrophe. The heat, like that of a furnace, rendered all approach dreadful.

Bently and his people drew out one miserable creature after another (even women and children were incorporated in this tremendous mass); and placing them in the boats, sent off every one as it was loaded. Fortunately Julall had been amongst the first to gain the river; he now jumped into his master's boat, and lent the most useful assistance. In this way many boat loads had been released. The work being under the command of European gentlemen, respectable natives began to lend their assistance. The sepoy and chokeydars

had succeeded in effecting a barrier across the top of the steps, and the ghauts became gradually more clear.

At this juncture Bently observed a native, who looked anxiously amongst the few remaining sufferers. There was a peculiarity in this man's gait and appearance; he examined all in his way, but whatever their necessity might be, he passed on, as if he had not found what he sought. At length, as he gradually mounted and drew near the barrier, it seemed as if he had discovered the object of his search; but he was dead. In stooping over the body to ascertain this fact, the wind blew back his chudder, which was thrown over his head. It carried his turban along with it, which rolled down the steps, and was in an instant at Bently's feet. Julall caught it up, as he regarded the handsome features of its owner, fully given to view, while his black eye flashed flame. Like a hunted lion he made one bound, and passed the barrier.

"It is O Meer Sing!" shouted a hundred voices at once.

The sepoy, with the steadiness of sentries upon duty, dared not leave their posts without orders, and to fire through the crowd was impossible. Bently sprung from the boat, ran up the steps, and calling to the sepoy to follow him, was in instant pursuit.

O Meer at the corner of the great temple found his grey Arab; but though swift of foot he was not Ally Buxus, and his rider made instantly for the place, where that faithful friend stood bridled and saddled. He dashed into his tent like a thunderbolt, and saw with as much dismay as if the lightning of heaven had struck him, that his trusty steed lay rolling on the ground, and had burst his saddle girths in his agony. His swollen tongue hung from his mouth, and his bridle was white with foam.

“Who has done this! What child of hell has dared to do it! Though I should go there to seek him, I will be revenged on him! My friend! my brother!” The horse knew his master’s voice; he made an effort to rise, but fell on the ground, his legs stiffly extended, and moved no more.

O Meer Sing grasped his pistol. A shot parted behind him, the ball entered. under his right shoulder, and passed through his body, which fell across that of his faithful horse, and the malignant Rizia, brandishing the weapon she had just fired, stood before him.

“I did it, O Meer Sing,” she said, with a fiend-like triumph; “I have overthrown the horse, and his rider; none ever escaped my revenge.”

The last syllable was lost; O Meer Sing’s pistol, true to his hand, even in the last moment, sent a bullet to the heart of the speaker. She made one fearful bound, and returned to the earth for ever.

The pistol fell from the nerveless grasp of him whose last act was vengeance. The noise brought those who had not been at the river, crowding into the tent; seeing the state of their leader, they fled without staying to make a comment or inquire into it.

At this instant Captain Bently and the sepoy came up; a general discharge of muskets arrested the flight of some, and accelerated that

of others. Those who had not suffered from the fire, without staying to ascertain the fate of their comrades, ran off in different directions.

“O Meer Sing!” shouted Bently. “Surround the tents! Bar his retreat! He is not with those who have fled!”

He made his way to the centre of the encampment, and started back two paces, when he perceived the enemy he had so long and so anxiously followed, within his reach, though beyond his power.

“Our work is finished,” said the subadar, looking down upon the high stiff features before him, “but who is this?” and he in turn recognised Rizia. “Our guide to the fort, and the nautch woman both in one. Her turban is fallen, though the men’s clothes remain, and it was she who poisoned this high caste brute. If O Meer Sing has been slain by her hand, the worst deed that he ever did is well paid. He has died the death of a dog, by the hand of a woman.”

There now remained nothing more to do. The men without had seized several horses

belonging to the absent members of the troop, and taken two or three prisoners, who had either fallen from their wounded horses, or been themselves wounded, in the general struggle for seizure and escape.

Bently therefore withdrew, with the intention of delivering his prisoners into the hands of the civil power, and sending their appointed servants to clear the place of the slain. Before this latter service could be effected, Ram Chund, who had been one of those at the river, stole softly back to the tent of his leader, took from his cummerbund the bag which contained his gold mohrs, and setting a match to the canvass, thus saved the body from the degradation of public exposition. The sepoy had come upon the phansygars at an hour in the morning when they were all seized without resistance; only Rizia, who had stolen forth in her male attire, with the intention of cutting off O Meer's escape, was absent; but as we have already seen, she met with the desert of her crimes. Those of her gang whose deeds could be proved, expiated their crimes on the gibbet; the rest

were no sooner released than they returned to their old avocations, justifying the act by saying, "We were born to be phansygars, and phansygars we must die. It is our *nisib*."

"We are now at liberty," said Bently, as he returned to join the party at breakfast in Colonel Howard's tent, and had given an account of the morning's proceedings, "to prolong our stay, or leave this place, just as we like best."

"Leave the place," said Fortescue.

"Leave the place," said Mrs. Melville, who never could hear the name of O Meer Sing with composure.

"To compromise the matter between those who may wish to go, and to stay, I vote," said Colonel Howard, "that we commence our march as soon as every thing can be got ready, and proceed slowly to Benares, notwithstanding Fortescue's unreasonable impatience, who wishes, like John Gilpin, to return at the rate by which he came here. To reconcile you to our slow mode of travelling, I would advise you to get an elephant for yourself, Fortescue; and perhaps some one," looking at Charlotte, "will

take compassion on you, and bear you company."

This proposal was received with delight, and followed by the thanks which it so well merited; and everything being settled to the satisfaction of all parties, they retired to make the necessary arrangements, and commenced their return homeward at the appointed time.

Fortescue received letters from Calcutta announcing the marriage of his cousin and Sir Robert Marshall. Charlotte also, in course of their route, had kind congratulations from Mrs. Russell, on the charming turn which things had taken, and earnest hopes that after her marriage, she and Mr. Fortescue would illuminate Calcutta with their presence; a step which, however, they had no intention of taking, as Fortescue was so fortunate as to be appointed one of the Judges of Benares, and had written to a friend on the spot, to engage and furnish for him a delightful house at no great distance from Colonel Howard's.

One week after their return to Benares, the station chaplain united Fortescue and Charlotte

in the hall of the commanding officer's bungalow. Elizabeth witnessed the ceremony, which she believed secured the happiness of two beings whom she loved, with unmingled pleasure; but Flora's smile was moistened by a tear. Julall, by orders of the bridegroom (who had settled a pension upon him for his river's service), was dressed in a gay new suit, and admitted into the room. He told Colonel Howard's servants that he had a right to go before them, for if the young lady had been drowned upon the bank, the marriage could not have taken place.

Mrs. Melville remained with the friends she loved, until her dear boy could walk without assistance. To witness their happiness was balm to her generous heart, and perhaps nothing but the consideration of her child's well-being could have induced her to leave them and return to Europe, after having passed some months with her dear aunt and uncle at Calcutta. The growth and improvement of her beloved boy, who year by year became more like his father, was reward sufficient to her for

all her exertions; and she tried to make the improvement of the trials which had been sent her, in the way which was doubtless intended by Him who saw from the beginning to the end. Often, on receiving letters from Charlotte and Elizabeth, she compared their lot with hers, and thought of the diversity of European life in India.

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